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Influence of Financial Rewards on Job Retention among Critical Care Nurses in Selected Public and Private Hospitals in Kenya

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Critical care nursing is a pivotal element in the provision of healthcare services. The presence of proficient critical care nurses is fundamental to achieving optimal patient outcomes. Nevertheless, most public and private hospitals in Kenya often face difficulties retaining qualified critical care nurses. These challenges have been attributed to many factors, chief among them being poor financial compensation. Therefore, this study assessed the influence of financial rewards on nurse retention in selected public and private hospitals in Kenya. The study focused on two prominent healthcare facilities: Tenwek Hospital, a private level six hospital in Bomet County, and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH) in Uasin Gishu County. It adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 149 critical care nurses from the two hospitals. A census sampling approach was utilised due to the relatively small population size of 149 critical care nurses. The data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire, whose response rate was 89.3% (133 questionnaires). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages and mean scores, were generated on the collected data using SPSS Version 28. Inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between financial compensation and retention of critical care nurses. From the findings, financial rewards demonstrated a strong positive correlation with job retention ($r = 0.920$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting that adequate compensation plays a crucial role in influencing a nurse's decision to remain in their current role. Therefore, financial incentives such as competitive salaries and bonuses significantly motivated nurses to stay. Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that hospitals review and improve their compensation packages, incorporating regular salary reviews and performance-based incentives to boost retention.

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INTRODUCTION

Health care services constitute a significant expense for governments around the world. Despite the enormous costs associated with healthcare, there is still a severe scarcity of healthcare professionals. According to estimates, in 2013 alone, there was a deficit of 17.4 million healthcare workers globally (McIsaac *et al.*, 2024; Wiskow, 2017). Recruiting and placing health personnel is a ubiquitous challenge the world over. Poor working conditions, low pay, and limited career opportunities are to blame for the high turnover and attrition in the health profession (Wiskow, 2017). According to Wiskow, working conditions and pay are directly correlated with job discontent in the health sector. Working conditions, in particular heavy workloads, long hours of work, poor infrastructure, a lack of control over tasks, and a lack of professional advancement and recognition, are major factors in the health sector's high unemployment rate.

The impact of compensation strategies on job retention among critical care nurses in public and private hospitals varies across various regions. In the United States, public hospitals often offer competitive salaries supplemented by comprehensive benefits packages, which may include health insurance, retirement plans, and tuition reimbursement, aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and retention (Auerbach, Buerhaus & Staiger, 2017). Conversely, private hospitals may offer higher salaries and more flexible work arrangements to attract top talent, yet they sometimes lack the extensive benefits that public hospitals provide (Cohen & Tal, 2019). Scandinavian countries typically emphasise strong collective bargaining agreements, which

result in standardised salaries and benefits that support job retention (Lindqvist *et al.*, 2019). In Canada, both public and private healthcare sectors focus on competitive compensation, but public hospitals often provide additional job security and structured career advancement opportunities that are crucial for retaining critical care nurses (Buchan, Duffield & Jordan, 2018). In contrast, China's private healthcare sector offers higher wages and performance-based incentives to attract skilled nurses, yet public hospitals still dominate in terms of job security and benefits, impacting overall job retention in both sectors (Liu & Wang, 2020). This multifaceted landscape illustrates how varying compensation strategies across different healthcare systems influence critical care nurse retention, highlighting the need for tailored approaches that consider regional healthcare dynamics and workforce needs.

Moreover, in South Africa, the impact of compensation strategies on critical care nursing goes beyond recruitment and retention. Nurses' job satisfaction is intricately tied to the compensation they receive. A study by Auerbach *et al.* (2017) indicated that higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with increased nurse retention and improved patient care. Job satisfaction is not solely influenced by financial compensation but also by factors such as workload, work-life balance, and opportunities for career advancement. Public hospitals, while constrained by budget limitations, can strive to enhance job satisfaction by focusing on creating supportive work environments, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and providing clear pathways for career growth. Private hospitals, with their competitive compensation

packages, can also contribute to job satisfaction by addressing concerns related to nurse workload and stress.

In the East African context, compensation strategies for critical care nursing have been found to emphasise non-monetary incentives due to budgetary constraints in public healthcare systems. In Kenya, for instance, public hospitals typically offer job security, opportunities for training, and access to essential resources, which are crucial for nurse retention in these settings (Mbindyo, Blaauw & English, 2013). Conversely, private hospitals tend to provide higher salaries and performance-based incentives, but they often struggle with resource limitations, impacting the overall quality of care and job satisfaction for nurses (Ogutu & Muturi, 2020). The emphasis on non-monetary benefits in the public sector reflects a strategy to enhance job satisfaction and retention despite financial limitations. This complex interplay of compensation strategies highlights the need for tailored approaches to improve job retention among critical care nurses, addressing the unique challenges faced in each healthcare environment.

In Kenya, the shortage and poor retention of critical care nurses remain pressing issues, especially in high-tier hospitals where critical care nursing services are most needed. Although there are general compensation structures across public and private healthcare institutions, the extent to which these strategies influence the retention of critical care nurses is not well understood. Prior studies have examined job satisfaction and staff turnover among general health workers in counties like Isiolo, Nakuru, and others (Gichuru, 2014; Wamunyu, 2016), but these studies primarily focused on lower-level facilities (Levels 4 and 5), where the scope of service delivery and working conditions differ significantly from national referral hospitals.

This study examined the influence of monetary compensation on retention of critical care nurses in two leading critical care service providers, namely Tenwek Hospital (private) and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital [MTRH] (public

hospital). These facilities serve large catchment areas, handle complex critical care cases, and employ specialised healthcare professionals. Records from Tenwek Hospital show that since 2020, at least ten critical care nurses have left their positions, creating gaps in service delivery (Tenwek Hospital, 2024). This trend highlights an urgent need to investigate the compensation mechanisms in place and their effectiveness in retaining skilled staff.

Financial Rewards and Their Influence on Job Retention in Healthcare

The healthcare sector worldwide faces challenges in retaining critical care nurses, with compensation strategies playing a crucial role in determining their job satisfaction and workforce stability. Research has shown that in developed countries such as the United States, Canada and those in Europe, compensation packages for critical care nurses are structured to include competitive salaries, performance-based incentives, comprehensive healthcare benefits, and retirement plans (Buchan *et al.*, 2018). Private hospitals in these regions often provide higher salaries and flexible work arrangements to attract top talent, while public hospitals emphasise long-term benefits such as job security, pension schemes, and professional development opportunities (Auerbach *et al.*, 2017). Despite these measures, high workloads, burnout, and workforce shortages continue to impact nurse retention, necessitating ongoing policy adjustments and financial investments in healthcare systems.

Across Africa, the retention of critical care nurses is a persistent challenge, largely due to limited financial resources, unfavourable working conditions, and migration to better-paying healthcare markets abroad (Pillay, 2018). Public hospitals in many African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana, offer structured salary scales determined by government frameworks, but these are often insufficient to meet the rising cost of living (Ballard *et al.*, 2021). Private hospitals, on the other hand, offer more attractive financial incentives but struggle with

inconsistent funding and limited job security. In South Africa, for example, a study revealed that private hospitals have emerged as significant employers of specialised nurses due to better remuneration, yet public hospitals continue to dominate healthcare provision despite staffing challenges (Bamford & Engelbrecht, 2019).

Within the East African context, research has shown that compensation strategies for critical care nurses vary across public and private hospitals (Muthuri, Senkubuge & Hongoro, 2020). Public healthcare facilities often face budgetary constraints, limiting their ability to offer competitive salaries and benefits. Instead, they focus on non-monetary incentives such as job stability, access to professional development, and career progression opportunities (Mbindyo *et al.*, 2013). On their part, private hospitals in East Africa, while offering higher salaries, may not always provide comprehensive benefits such as pension schemes, structured promotions, or long-term career security, which are vital factors in job retention (Ogutu & Muturi, 2020). The high attrition rate of critical care nurses in the region is also exacerbated by poor working conditions, heavy workloads, and limited resources, creating a need for improved compensation strategies that balance financial and non-financial incentives.

In Kenya, the retention of critical care nurses remains a pressing issue, particularly in both public and private hospitals. Public hospitals adhere to government salary scales, which, while structured, often fail to keep up with inflation and the cost of living, leading to dissatisfaction among healthcare workers (Gichuru, 2014). Private hospitals, on the other hand, offer slightly better pay but are not always able to match the long-term benefits provided in public healthcare institutions. Reports indicate that many critical care nurses seek employment abroad or transition to the private sector in search of better remuneration and improved working conditions (Wamunyu, 2016).

Research has shown that when nurses perceive their financial rewards as equitable and commensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities, they are more likely to remain in

their jobs (Hussein, 2020). Conversely, inadequate compensation or disparities in pay can lead to dissatisfaction and job turnover intentions among critical care nurses. This is particularly relevant in the context of Kenyan public hospitals, where healthcare workers often face challenges related to remuneration (Nyongesa, 2022). Moreover, financial rewards impact not only job retention but also the quality of patient care. Satisfied and financially secure nurses are more likely to provide high-quality care and demonstrate commitment to their patients and institutions (You *et al.*, 2013). This, in turn, contributes to better health outcomes for patients and the overall performance of healthcare facilities.

Research has further shown that the influence of financial rewards on job retention among critical care nurses extends beyond mere salary considerations. Comprehensive benefits packages, including healthcare coverage, retirement plans, and other incentives, also contribute significantly to their overall job satisfaction and retention. In many healthcare settings, the availability and adequacy of these benefits can be a deciding factor in whether nurses choose to continue their employment or seek opportunities elsewhere (Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009). Public hospitals in Kenya face unique challenges in attracting and retaining critical care nursing staff due to resource constraints and disparities in compensation compared to the private sector. Addressing these challenges by improving the financial rewards and benefits offered to critical care nurses can result in reduced turnover rates, a more stable workforce, and ultimately better patient care outcomes. This study, therefore, sought to examine the influence of financial compensation strategies on job retention among critical care nurses in Kenya's public and private hospitals.

Statement of the Problem

Critical care nurses play a crucial role in the management of critically ill patients, especially in high-level referral hospitals. Their skills and expertise are essential for improving patient

outcomes and ensuring the quality of care in intensive care units (ICUs). However, retaining these specialised professionals remains a challenge in many developing countries, including Kenya. Public healthcare facilities often face limitations in resources, poor working conditions, and uncompetitive compensation, which contribute to high turnover rates among critical care nurses. On their part, private hospitals have to contend with challenges related to funding and regulation.

Previous studies have highlighted dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions among health workers in Kenya. For example, a study in Isiolo County revealed that healthcare workers were unhappy with their compensation packages (Gichuru, 2014). Wamunyu (2016) also found that salary and work environment significantly affected job satisfaction, though her study was conducted at Nakuru level-five hospitals. These studies nonetheless did not focus on critical care workers; nor did they explore the unique challenges faced by critical care nurses in level-six hospitals, which handle more complex cases, have advanced equipment, and require more specialised personnel. Therefore, to fill this gap, the present study examined the influence of financial compensation on job retention among critical care nurses in two level-six hospitals, namely Tenwek and MTRH.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Expectancy Theory, propounded by Victor Vroom (1964), which postulated that people work hard because they hope to be rewarded. In the context of employment, therefore, individuals join organisations with expectations regarding their needs, motivations, and prior experiences. Moreover, the theory contends that workers' actions are the result of deliberate decisions. People are thus free to make their own decisions at work. Thus, each employee may have distinct needs from the company, which explains why some employees are content with their pay while others are not. In order to maximise results, employees will select the greatest option available

to them. Consequently, the expectation of reward from the employee's best alternative will determine their level of job satisfaction. The incentive may be intrinsic, such as favourable working conditions and recognition, or extrinsic, such as salary and benefits (Yaseen, 2013). This idea contributes to the connection between pay policies and job happiness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Bomet and Uasin Gishu Counties, focusing on two prominent healthcare facilities: Tenwek Hospital, a private level-six hospital in Bomet County, and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH), a public level-six hospital in Uasin Gishu County. These hospitals were selected due to their significant roles in providing healthcare services to large populations and their critical positions within Kenya's healthcare system. Tenwek Hospital and MTRH are known for their high patient volumes and challenging working conditions, making them ideal settings for examining the impact of compensation strategies on job retention among critical care nurses. Both hospitals also offer training services for health professionals.

For this study, a descriptive survey research design was employed, relying on a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data. The target population for the study consisted of 149 qualified nurses in the critical care units at Tenwek Hospital and MTRH. To determine the sample size, a census approach was utilised due to the relatively small population (149) of critical care nurses. Proportionate stratified random sampling was then applied to allocate participants from each hospital based on their population share. Thereafter, simple random sampling within each stratum identified individual participants. Recruitment was coordinated in collaboration with hospital administration and nursing departments, beginning with formal approval letters followed by meetings with unit supervisors to introduce the study.

The data for this study was collected using a questionnaire. Out of the 149 questionnaires, 133 were filled out and returned, representing a

response rate of 89.3%. The questionnaire featured structured, closed-ended items, enabling the collection of quantifiable data aligned with the study objective. The questionnaire was piloted for accuracy and validity on a sample of 10 ICU nurses from Kericho Level-Four Hospital, which shared similar demographic characteristics. Furthermore, to ensure consistency and validity of all items in the questionnaire, experts, in the form of the university supervisors and some healthcare practitioners, were used. They reviewed the instrument and suggested changes to refine the instrument's reliability. Additionally, the researchers employed the internal consistency method to assess the reliability of the research instruments. The reliability analysis involved calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all sections of the questionnaire based on the pilot study results. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of 0.7 or lower indicated low internal consistency (Cronbach & Azuma, 1962). The

results of the analysis of the five items on financial rewards was 0.910, hence the instrument was deemed reliable.

The collected data was cleaned and coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 for subsequent analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed in the analysis. Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations, while inferential statistics comprised Pearson's correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The study sought respondents' views on the financial rewards in their respective facilities. Five statements were proposed, and the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the items. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Critical Care Nurses' Perception of Financial Rewards

Statements	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
I believe that the financial rewards (salary and bonuses) I receive are competitive compared to similar positions in other healthcare institutions.	133	1.0	5.0	4.594	.8707
Financial rewards, such as salary increases and performance-based bonuses, are important factors that influence my decision to stay in my current job.	133	1.0	5.0	4.263	.7775
The availability of financial incentives, such as housing allowances or health insurance, positively impacts my job retention.	133	1.0	5.0	4.023	.4346
I feel financially secure in my current position, and this contributes to my job satisfaction and retention.	133	1.0	5.0	4.902	.4903
Opportunities for financial growth and advancement within the organization are essential for my long-term commitment to this hospital.	133	1.0	5.0	3.459	.7835
Valid N (listwise)	133				

Source: *Field data (2025)*

The statement "I feel financially secure in my current position, and this contributes to my job satisfaction and retention" recorded the highest mean of 4.902, indicating strong agreement among respondents that financial security is a key factor in their continued service. This was closely followed by the statement on competitive financial rewards, which had a mean of 4.594, suggesting that most nurses perceive their salaries

and bonuses as fair compared to similar roles in other healthcare institutions. Furthermore, performance-based bonuses and salary increases also received a high mean of 4.263, highlighting their importance in influencing retention. The availability of financial incentives, such as housing allowances and health insurance, scored a mean of 4.023, showing their positive influence, albeit to a slightly lesser extent. However, the

statement “Opportunities for financial growth and advancement within the organisation are essential for my long-term commitment” received the lowest mean of 3.459, suggesting that while current financial incentives are appreciated, there is moderate concern about limited financial advancement opportunities in the future.

The study further sought to find out the views on job retention. Six statements were proposed in the structured questionnaire, to which the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed. The findings are as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Critical Care Nurses’ Views on Job Retention

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
I feel secure in my current position as a critical care nurse.	133	1.0	5.0	3.812	.8803
I am satisfied with my current job as a critical care nurse.	133	1.0	5.0	4.752	.6325
I am able to maintain a healthy work-life balance while working as a critical care nurse.	133	1.0	5.0	3.759	.5793
I receive sufficient training to stay updated with the latest practices in critical care.	133	1.0	5.0	3.045	.4240
I am satisfied with the salary and benefits provided for my role as a critical care nurse.	133	1.0	5.0	2.737	.6617
The working conditions in my unit are safe and conducive to delivering quality care.	133	1.0	5.0	3.331	1.1127
Valid N (listwise)	133				

Source: *Field data (2025)*

As indicated in Table 2, the item “I am satisfied with my current job as a critical care nurse” recorded the highest mean score of 4.752, reflecting a generally high level of job satisfaction among respondents. Similarly, a relatively high mean of 3.812 was recorded for “I feel secure in my current position,” suggesting that a majority of nurses feel a sense of job stability. In terms of work-life balance, the score was also moderately high (mean = 3.759), indicating that many nurses were able to manage their personal and professional lives effectively, which was an important aspect of retention. However, access to sufficient training showed a notably lower mean score of 3.045, pointing to a gap in continuous professional development opportunities, which could undermine long-term retention and quality care provision.

Even more concerning was the low mean of 2.737 for satisfaction with salary and benefits, suggesting that many critical care nurses feel inadequately compensated for their work. Inadequate financial compensation has been consistently identified as a major factor leading to attrition among healthcare workers. Additionally, satisfaction with working conditions (mean = 3.331) was average, indicating room for improvement in workplace safety and support.

Inferential Statistics

The study sought to establish the correlation between financial compensation strategies and job retention among critical care nurses at Tenwek Hospital and MTRH. The correlation results were as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Results

		Financial rewards	Job retention
Financial rewards	Pearson Correlation	1	.920**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	133	133
Job retention	Pearson Correlation	.920**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	133	133

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

Source: *Field data (2025)*

The correlation analysis reveals a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between financial rewards and job retention among critical care nurses. Notably, financial rewards demonstrated a strong positive correlation with job retention ($r = 0.920$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting that adequate compensation plays a crucial role in influencing a nurse's decision to remain in their current role.

Overall, the study revealed that financial rewards had a significant positive effect on job retention among critical care nurses in selected public and private hospitals in Kenya. The data showed high mean scores for statements related to salary competitiveness (mean = 4.594), financial security (mean = 4.902), and the influence of salary and bonuses on retention (mean = 4.263). These findings suggested that when nurses perceived their financial compensation to be fair, secure, and competitive, they were more likely to remain in their current positions. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation coefficient between financial rewards and job retention was 0.920, indicating a very strong and statistically significant relationship. This underscored the importance of adequate financial incentives as a strategic tool for retaining skilled critical care personnel in healthcare institutions.

DISCUSSION

Financial rewards significantly influenced job retention among critical care nurses in selected public and private hospitals in Kenya. The strong positive correlation ($r = .920$, $p < .01$) between financial rewards and job retention indicated that nurses who felt adequately compensated were

more likely to remain in their positions. Most respondents agreed that competitive salaries, performance-based bonuses, and additional financial incentives such as housing allowances and health insurance contributed to job satisfaction and the decision to stay. The highest mean score ($M = 4.902$) was recorded for feeling financially secure in their current role, underscoring the importance of financial stability in retaining staff. Therefore, enhancing financial reward packages was essential for reducing turnover and improving retention rates among critical care nurses. These findings aligned with those of Chenevert *et al.* (2013), who found that financial rewards were key predictors of employee retention, especially in highly skilled professions like nursing.

Other studies conducted in Kenya, including Hussein (2020) and Nyongesa (2022), found that when nurses perceive their financial rewards as equitable and commensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities, they are more likely to remain in their jobs. On the other hand, inadequate compensation or disparities in pay can lead to dissatisfaction and job turnover intentions among critical care nurses. Nyongesa underscores that, in Kenya's public hospitals, healthcare workers often face challenges related to remuneration. Moreover, financial rewards impact not only job retention but also the quality of patient care. The results also reaffirmed the challenges highlighted by Ojaka, Olango and Jarvis (2014) and Barasa *et al.* (2015), who noted that inadequate compensation, poor working environments, and limited professional

development opportunities contribute to high turnover among healthcare professionals.

The findings of this study were also consistent with both local and international literature on employee retention in healthcare. According to You *et al.* (2013), satisfied and financially secure nurses are more likely to provide high-quality care and demonstrate commitment to their patients and institutions. This, in turn, contributes to better health outcomes for patients and the overall performance of healthcare facilities. The strong correlation between financial rewards and job retention observed in this study aligns with Shields and Ward (2001), who emphasised that dissatisfaction with pay is a major predictor of nurse turnover. Similarly, the importance of non-financial factors such as recognition, work-life balance, and training opportunities resonates with findings by Chenevert *et al.* (2013), who highlighted that supportive work environments and professional growth are key determinants of staff commitment.

As further argued by Hayes *et al.* (2012) and Chan *et al.* (2013), job retention was influenced by a combination of financial and non-financial incentives, with working conditions playing a critical role in shaping job satisfaction. Additionally, Armstrong (2010) underscored the importance of organisational culture, job security, and safe workplaces in sustaining employee commitment.

By contextualising the results of the study within Kenya's healthcare system, it is evident that both public and private hospitals face similar retention challenges, though the degree may vary due to differences in resources, infrastructure, and management practices. This underscores the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines competitive financial packages, supportive non-financial incentives, and favourable working conditions to effectively retain critical care nurses in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Retention of critical care nurses in Kenya is a multifaceted issue that extends beyond salary considerations. The study concluded that financial compensation, including competitive salaries, allowances, and timely payment, played a critical role in retaining critical care nurses. Adequate compensation significantly reduced turnover, indicating that fair remuneration packages were central to addressing the shortage of specialised nurses. Therefore, sustained investment in workforce financial welfare was not only a retention strategy but also a pathway to achieving universal health coverage goals in Kenya. For scholars, the results provide a foundation for further research into region-specific and cadre-specific retention strategies, while also contributing to the broader discourse on health workforce sustainability in low- and middle-income countries. In light of the study findings, there is a need to enhance the existing Human Resource for Health (HRH) Policy by incorporating comprehensive and competitive financial compensation structures tailored specifically for critical care nurses. This includes regular salary benchmarking and structured performance-based incentives.

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