



ORIGINAL

Healthcare Professionals' Job Satisfaction at Primary Healthcare Centers in The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia

Satisfacción laboral de los profesionales sanitarios en los centros de atención primaria de la provincia oriental de Arabia Saudita

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: a lack of job satisfaction is identified as a primary factor contributing to high staff turnover among healthcare professionals.

Objective: to assess the extent of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia.

Methods: the study employed a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional research approach. Convenience sampling was employed to select a sample of 300 healthcare professionals from primary healthcare centers in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia. A digital survey, including a sociodemographic data sheet and a job satisfaction questionnaire, was distributed to healthcare personnel through various social media channels. The study adhered to all ethical protocols in scientific research, and data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics with the SPSS V 26.0 program.

Results: regarding job satisfaction, 39 % of respondents reported a high level of contentment with their work environment, while only 6 % indicated a strong sense of dissatisfaction. Notably, the categories of "employees' experience" and "benefits offered by the organization" garnered the greatest mean score and the highest satisfaction levels, with a significant 40 % expressing great satisfaction. However, the aspect that received the lowest satisfaction mean score among participants was "workplace flexibility," with only 36 % expressing high levels of satisfaction concerning this point. The average score for job satisfaction was $7,32 \pm 2,9$, indicating a moderate to high degree of satisfaction among professionals.

Conclusions: primary healthcare workers experienced moderate to high levels of job satisfaction. The findings emphasize the importance of implementing a flexible work structure to enhance job satisfaction within the healthcare industry.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction; Healthcare Professionals; Primary Healthcare Centers; Eastern Province; Saudi Arabia.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la falta de satisfacción laboral se considera un factor principal que contribuye a la alta rotación de personal entre los profesionales de la salud.

Objetivo: evaluar el grado de satisfacción laboral entre los profesionales de la salud en la región oriental de Arabia Saudita.

Método: el estudio empleó un enfoque de investigación cuantitativo, descriptivo y transversal. Se empleó un muestreo por conveniencia para seleccionar una muestra de 300 profesionales de la salud de centros de atención primaria de salud en la región oriental de Arabia Saudita. Se distribuyó al personal sanitario a través de diversos canales de redes sociales una encuesta digital que incluye una ficha de datos sociodemográficos y un cuestionario de satisfacción laboral. El estudio siguió todos los protocolos éticos en investigación científica y el análisis de los datos se realizó mediante estadística descriptiva con el programa SPSS V 26.0.

Resultados: en cuanto a la satisfacción laboral, el 39 % de los encuestados informó un alto nivel de satisfacción con su entorno laboral, mientras que sólo el 6 % indicó un fuerte sentimiento de insatisfacción. Cabe destacar que las categorías de “experiencia de los empleados” y “beneficios que ofrece la organización” obtuvieron la mayor puntuación media y los mayores niveles de satisfacción, con un importante 40 % expresando gran satisfacción. Sin embargo, el aspecto que obtuvo la puntuación media de satisfacción más baja entre los participantes fue la “flexibilidad laboral”, ya que sólo el 36 % expresó altos niveles de satisfacción con respecto a este punto. La puntuación media de satisfacción laboral fue de $7,32 \pm 2,9$, lo que indica un grado de satisfacción moderado a alto entre los profesionales.

Conclusiones: los trabajadores de atención primaria de salud experimentaron niveles de satisfacción laboral de moderados a altos. Los hallazgos enfatizan la importancia de implementar una estructura de trabajo flexible para mejorar la satisfacción laboral dentro de la industria de la salud.

Palabras clave: Satisfacción Laboral; Profesionales de la Salud; Centros de Atención Primaria de Salud; Provincia Oriental; Arabia Saudita.

INTRODUCTION

Ensuring job satisfaction among healthcare workers is a paramount priority for every organization. For most healthcare institutions, the process of replacing licensed professionals is both expensive and time-consuming. The scarcity of healthcare experts and the frequent turnover of staff continue to pose significant challenges for healthcare systems globally. These issues have gained considerable attention from numerous countries, including Saudi Arabia, as highlighted by the World Health Organization.⁽¹⁾

Job satisfaction, also known as employee satisfaction, refers to the level of contentment that individuals experience in their occupations. It encompasses their overall liking of the job and specific elements such as the type of work or supervision.⁽²⁾ Job satisfaction can be assessed using cognitive “evaluative,” affective “emotional,” and behavioral components.⁽³⁾

Job satisfaction represents the overall connection between an individual and their employer in exchange for monetary compensation. Satisfaction refers to the straightforward sensation of achieving a goal or target. According to Hamid et al.⁽⁴⁾ job dissatisfaction leads to a lack of motivation in the workplace.

The level of contentment experienced in a job significantly influences the display of favorable work conduct within the Saudi corporate setting. Employee job satisfaction is a crucial factor that stimulates productivity in the workforce. To maintain a competitive business climate, forward-thinking organizations must prioritize the necessary focus on ensuring employee satisfaction.^(5,6) There is a widespread argument that employee job satisfaction is a crucial factor in determining their overall well-being, allowing employees to make an informed choice about whether to stay with a certain company or leave.

Employee job satisfaction is associated with several positive behavioral outcomes in the workplace. Optimal job satisfaction fosters efficient work behavior and empowers staff to effectively meet the needs of customers/patients. According to Wang et al.⁽⁷⁾, it enhances the customer experience in the workplace and decreases employees' intention to leave their jobs. Moreover, satisfaction among healthcare professionals can be defined as a favorable sense of fulfillment that individuals have when employed by a business organization. Employees' job satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation of employees' attitudes toward their employment, specifically indicating the extent to which they have positive or negative feelings toward their work.⁽⁸⁾ Individuals who derive pleasure and satisfaction from their work tend to exhibit a sense of fulfillment and productivity. Conversely, employees who are dissatisfied with their work experience low levels of job satisfaction and may encounter stress, burnout, and psychological health disorders.⁽⁹⁾

According to Colquitt et al.⁽¹⁰⁾ the correlation between employee success and job satisfaction is significant enough for organizations to consider the impact of both factors. According to Wibowo⁽¹⁰⁾ job satisfaction is a reliable indicator of job performance. Job satisfaction and success have a mutually influential relationship, with a moderate impact on one another. Content employees will perform more effectively, thus amplifying the favorable outcomes of the firm⁽¹²⁾ and mitigating adverse consequences, such as financial losses.⁽¹³⁾

The significance of employees' job satisfaction cannot be overstated when it comes to well-being, contentment, care outcomes, and the overall provision of healthcare to patients. This is because employees' job satisfaction holds significant importance in their everyday work lives. The primary factor leading to healthcare providers leaving their positions is demonstrated to be low job satisfaction.⁽¹⁴⁾ Diminished job satisfaction adversely impacts the caliber of services rendered by healthcare professionals and their dedication to the organization. This may be attributed to insufficient personnel or psychological strain.⁽¹⁵⁾

A workplace that is favorable and characterized by enthusiasm is crucial in promoting job satisfaction among employees, particularly in the healthcare sector where frequent strike actions occur due to substandard work conditions. The physical and emotional environment encompasses factors like working circumstances, employee rights, employee voice, safe working conditions, cooperative team members, and a supportive supervisor, among other aspects. The concept consists of two broad spectrums: work and context.⁽¹⁶⁾

The work environment in healthcare delivery settings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can significantly influence the job satisfaction of healthcare workers.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, there is a dearth of research conducted to ascertain the level of job satisfaction among those employed in primary healthcare centers in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The objective of the present study was to describe the level of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals working at primary healthcare centers in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia.

For the significance of the study, work encompasses various elements of employment and task-based activities, including training, autonomy, a sense of achievement in the workplace, a diverse range of tasks, and intrinsic value associated with those tasks. An additional factor known as context, as highlighted by Halawani et al.⁽⁶⁾, plays a crucial role in influencing the work environment and employee satisfaction. The workplace comprises tangible environmental factors and interpersonal dynamics that collectively shape the working environment. Various factors such as employee safety, job security, positive interpersonal relationships among colleagues, acknowledgment of exceptional effort and performance, strong motivation for high performance, and active participation in organizational decision-making processes contribute to the overall work environment.⁽¹⁸⁾

Recent studies have indicated that employees who perceive a high value placed on them by their firm are more likely to demonstrate increased commitment and a stronger sense of ownership in the workplace.^(19,20,21) Factors related to the work environment, such as salary, work schedule, employee autonomy, organizational hierarchy, and efficient communication between management and employees, can significantly influence employee satisfaction. Additionally, a positive managerial disposition, as emphasized by Farman et al.⁽²²⁾ is a crucial aspect that stimulates job satisfaction.

Further research has shown that a positive supervisory attitude not only fosters talent development and keeps professionals on track but also showcases conflict management skills that contribute to favorable team dynamics.⁽²³⁾

Despite these insights, there is a lack of research in Saudi Arabia regarding job satisfaction among healthcare workers in primary healthcare institutions, particularly in the eastern province. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by evaluating job satisfaction among healthcare professionals working at primary healthcare centers in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia.

Research Questions

The research aims to address the following:

1. What is the extent of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals working in primary healthcare centers in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia?

METHODS

The current investigation adopted a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional research approach. The research was conducted at primary healthcare facilities located in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia in the first quarter of 2024.

To determine the minimum sample size needed for this research, a power analysis equation was utilized, considering the size of the target population and a desired confidence level of 95 %. The analysis indicated that a minimum of 278 healthcare professionals from the primary healthcare centers in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia were required for the study. However, convenience sampling was employed, and a total of 300 participants were recruited.

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire consisting of two primary sections:

- I. *Sociodemographic data sheet*: This section collected information regarding participants' age, gender, marital status, field of specialization, professional experience, and educational attainment.
- II. *Employee satisfaction survey*: The survey tool used was based on the employee satisfaction survey⁽²⁴⁾ to align with the specific requirements and goals of the present study. Workplace satisfaction of the participants was assessed using a Likert scale consisting of seven questions, with responses ranging from 1 to 5.

Data collection involved distributing an electronic questionnaire to a convenient sample of healthcare workers through social media platforms such as email and WhatsApp. The survey link was distributed iteratively to the participants until the desired sample size was attained.

Data was collected, refined, and classified during the investigation. Statistical analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26.⁽²⁵⁾ Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations for continuous variables, and numbers and percentages for categorical variables, were used to present the data. The findings were displayed in tables and graphs as appropriate.

Prior to commencing data collection, the research team obtained ethical approval from the ethics committee of the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Faisal University. The approval letter, with the reference number KFU-REC-2023-SEP-ETHICS1359, was obtained to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were not subjected to coercion or provided with financial compensation. Before responding to the computerized questionnaire, participants were required to review and provide their agreement to the enclosed informed consent form.

To protect participants' anonymity, no personal information or identifying details were solicited. Furthermore, all ethical guidelines pertaining to medical research involving human subjects were strictly adhered to.

RESULTS

The study aimed to assess the job satisfaction of healthcare professionals in the primary health sector in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of healthcare professionals in the primary health sector in the Eastern Region, with a total sample size of 300. In terms of age, the majority of the healthcare professionals were between 30 to 39 years old (58,6 %). Regarding nationality, most of the healthcare professionals were Saudi (87,2 %), while the remaining were non-Saudi (12,8 %). In terms of the gender of participants, the majority were male (78,5 %), and only 21,5 % were female. Regarding marital status, many healthcare professionals were married (76,2 %), while only 23,8 % were single.

Sociodemographic data		n	%
Age	Less than 30 years	48	15,90 %
	30 to 39 years	176	58,60 %
	40 to 49 years	61	20,50 %
	50 years or more	15	5,10 %
Nationality	Saudi	262	87,20 %
	Non-Saudi	38	12,80 %
Gender	Male	236	78,50 %
	Female	64	21,50 %
Marital status	Single	74	23,80 %
	Married	226	76,20 %

Table 2 provides work-related information for healthcare professionals in the primary health sector in the Eastern Region. In terms of job titles, nursing was the most common job title (27,9 %), followed by physician (22,5 %). The remaining job titles were dentist, epidemiology technician, dental assistant, safety officer, laboratory technician, radiology technician, pharmacist, and others. Regarding the kind of employment, the vast majority of the participants were health practitioners (92,8 %), while only a small proportion were administrative (7,2 %).

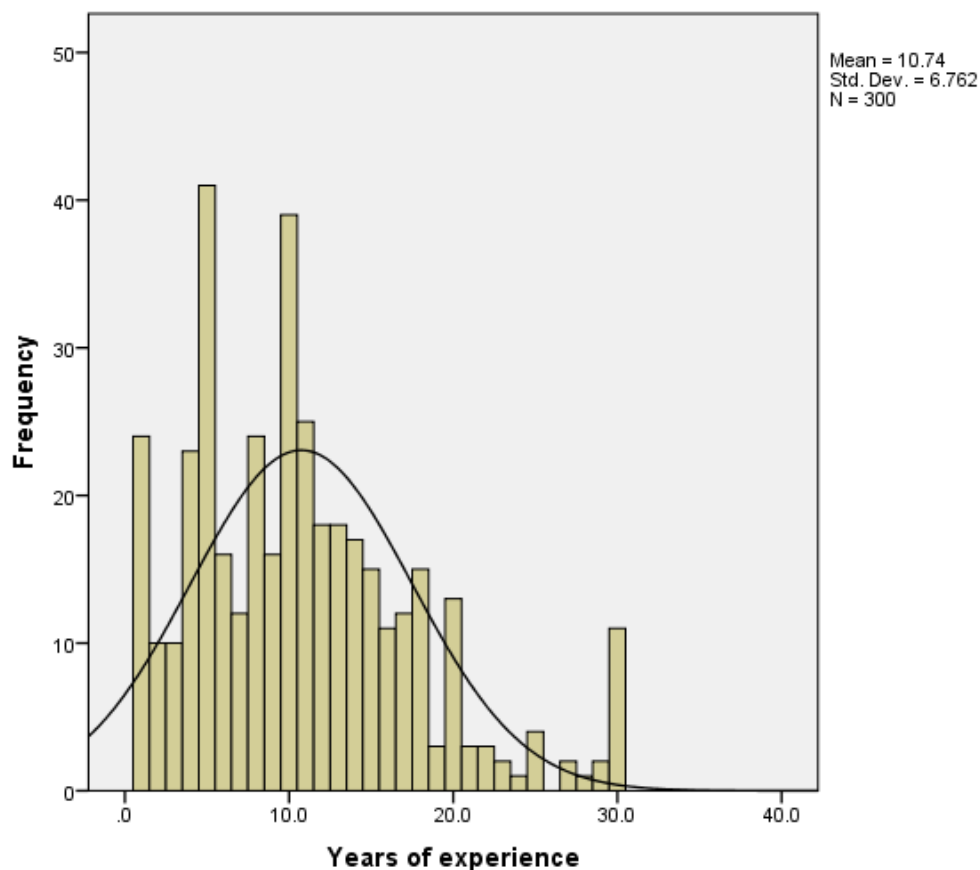
In terms of educational level, the majority of healthcare professionals had a diploma (45,0 %) or a bachelor's degree (40,4 %). A smaller proportion of healthcare professionals had a master's degree (9,0 %) or a doctorate (3,8 %), while a very small proportion had only a high school education (1,8 %).

Figure 1 reflects the years of experience of the healthcare professionals in the primary health sector in the Eastern Region. The minimum and maximum years of experience were 1,0 and 30,0 years, respectively. The mean years of experience was 10,744, indicating that the average healthcare worker in the primary health sector in the eastern region had 10,744 years of experience. The standard deviation was 6,7620, suggesting that there was some variability in the years of experience among the healthcare professionals in the sample.

Concerning the job satisfaction of the participants and on a Likert scale ranging from 5 to one, where 5 reflected very satisfied and 1 reflected very dissatisfied, 39 % of the participants reported that they were very satisfied with their work setting compared to only 6 % of them who reported that they were extremely dissatisfied (table 3).

Table 2. Work-related information of the participants (N=300)

Work-Related information		n	%
Job title	Epidemiology technician	5	1,80 %
	Dentist	21	6,90 %
	Dental assistant	11	3,60 %
	Safety officer	22	7,40 %
	Laboratory technician	12	4,10 %
	Radiology technician	11	3,80 %
	Nursing	84	27,90 %
	Physician	68	22,50 %
	Medical records technician	22	7,20 %
	Pharmacist	18	6,10 %
	Other	26	8,70 %
Kind of Employment	Administrative	22	7,20 %
	Health Practitioner	278	92,80 %
Educational level	High school	5	1,80 %
	Diploma	135	45,00 %
	Bachelor	121	40,40 %
	Masters	27	9,00 %
	Doctorate	12	3,80 %

**Figure 1. Years of experience of the participants**

For the details, the highest percentage of the participants (40,0 %) reported that they were very satisfied with both “employees’ experience in the primary healthcare center or healthcare institution” and “the benefits offered by the organization” compared to 3,4 % and 6 % respectively who reported that they were very

dissatisfied with those two points.

On the other hand, the lowest scores of job satisfaction were reported for the “flexibility offered at work” as 36,0 % of the participants were very satisfied compared to 8 % who reported extreme dissatisfaction with the flexibility they had at their hospitals ($M \pm SD = 3,647 \pm 1,197$).

Overall, the mean of the Likert job satisfaction scale was 3,805, reflecting moderate to high levels of job satisfaction among the participants.

Table 3, Job satisfaction scale of the participants (N=300)

Employee Satisfaction Survey	Very dissatisfied	Not satisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Mean	Standard Deviation
	%	%	%	%	%		
1, Benefits offered by the organization	6,00 %	17,30 %	14,70 %	22,00 %	40,00 %	3,927	1,31
2, Appreciation for your efforts by your superiors	7,30 %	11,30 %	16,00 %	26,70 %	38,70 %	3,78	1,274
3, Flexibility offered at work	8,00 %	8,70 %	18,00 %	29,30 %	36,00 %	3,647	1,197
4, Business/growth decisions taken by the executive team	8,70 %	7,30 %	18,00 %	26,70 %	39,30 %	3,807	1,273
5, The primary healthcare work environment and infrastructure	4,00 %	15,30 %	18,00 %	26,70 %	36,00 %	3,753	1,209
6, A channel/medium provided to openly and freely communicate your concerns, suggestions, and ideas	6,00 %	10,70 %	20,70 %	24,00 %	38,70 %	3,787	1,235
7, The employees' experience in the primary healthcare center or healthcare institution	3,40 %	11,30 %	16,70 %	28,70 %	40,00 %	3,933	1,127
Total	6 %	12 %	17 %	26 %	39 %	3,805	1,157

Among the study sample, healthcare professionals' perception of job satisfaction was measured on a self-reporting Likert scale from zero to 10, with a mean score of $7,32 \pm 2,9$, reflecting a moderate to high level of job satisfaction among them.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to describe the level of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals working at primary healthcare centers in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. A total of 300 healthcare professionals employed in the primary health sector of the eastern region completed the questionnaire.

Regarding job satisfaction among participants in the present study, more than 33 % of healthcare professionals employed in the primary health sector expressed high levels of satisfaction with their work environment, while only 6 % reported feeling extremely dissatisfied. Additionally, the average score on the job satisfaction measure indicated a substantial degree of job satisfaction among the participants in the present study.

This finding is supported by a study conducted to evaluate job satisfaction among healthcare practitioners in India, both in public and private healthcare settings. Srivastava, Singh⁽²⁶⁾ discovered that job satisfaction was generally high, with the private healthcare sector in India exhibiting higher levels compared to the public sector. Furthermore, a previous study on the job satisfaction of primary healthcare practitioners revealed that nurse practitioners in primary care expressed significant levels of job satisfaction, attributed to characteristics such as autonomy, sense of achievement, and the amount of time dedicated to patient care.⁽²⁷⁾

Similarly, a study conducted in Saudi Arabia to investigate the factors influencing job satisfaction among nurses in a tertiary care center showed that 79,3 % of the participants expressed significant satisfaction with their current job and the nursing profession.⁽²⁸⁾ These results align with a prior study investigating the correlation between job satisfaction rates and congruence of person-job values among healthcare leaders, which revealed a moderate to high level of workplace satisfaction among both senior healthcare leaders and nursing seniors.⁽²⁹⁾

In contrast, the current research findings contradicted the results of a prior study conducted by Mishari et al.⁽³⁰⁾ on primary healthcare physicians in Baghdad, who reported relatively low levels of job satisfaction due to dissatisfaction with the working environment, salary, management, and working hours. Similarly, a study conducted in Nigeria to evaluate the job satisfaction and work environment of primary healthcare nurses found that the majority of nurses (67,1 %) reported a low level of job satisfaction in their work environments.

⁽⁹⁾ Another study conducted in Greece examined the job satisfaction of primary healthcare providers and found

mixed levels of satisfaction, with particular discontent about pay and promotions.⁽³¹⁾

In the present study, job satisfaction was found to be highest among healthcare professionals, specifically in relation to the benefits and perks provided to them by the organization and the employees' experience at primary healthcare centers. However, professionals' job satisfaction was significantly lower due to the limited flexibility they had in their work environment. A study conducted in Al-Madinah Al-Munawwara, Saudi Arabia, with the participation of 445 primary healthcare providers revealed a substantial incidence of discontentment among the participants. Specifically, 67,1 % of the nurses and 52,4 % of the physicians indicated dissatisfaction with their occupations. The main sources of discontent among physicians were the lack of career prospects, the quality of patient care, and financial remuneration. For nurses, limited professional prospects, excessive workload, and inadequate recognition and awards were the primary factors causing dissatisfaction.⁽³²⁾

The findings of the present study contradict the results of research conducted to evaluate the factors influencing job satisfaction among nurses at a tertiary care hospital in Saudi Arabia. Despite the overall high level of job satisfaction among nurses, a significant 46,4 % expressed dissatisfaction with their remuneration and salary. Approximately 50 % of the nurses expressed discontentment over the nurse/patient ratio, workload, autonomy, and the allocated time for nurses to address their concerns.⁽²⁸⁾

A study conducted by Lorber, Skela Savič⁽³³⁾ in Slovenian hospitals aimed to investigate the job satisfaction of nurses and identify the elements influencing their satisfaction. The findings indicated that both leaders and employees typically experienced a moderate degree of satisfaction in their respective work environments. Furthermore, the study identified several distinct factors that have a substantial impact on job satisfaction, including the age of employees, the duration of their employment, as well as the personal qualities and managerial competencies of leaders.⁽³³⁾

A cross-sectional survey conducted in the United Kingdom aimed to assess nurses' job dissatisfaction. The results indicated that the primary cause of this dissatisfaction was the inadequate support provided to nurses, particularly during stressful circumstances. Furthermore, the discontent can be attributed to the leadership style of nursing leaders and hospital administrators, as well as the absence of empowerment provided to hospital workers.⁽³⁴⁾

The current study demonstrated the significance of implementing a flexible work system in healthcare institutions. It highlights the substantial impact of work system flexibility on enhancing job satisfaction and promoting employee retention among healthcare professionals.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study support the notion that healthcare professionals in primary healthcare centers in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia generally experience moderate to high levels of job satisfaction, which is considered acceptable. They express satisfaction with their experience at the primary healthcare facilities and the benefits provided by their employers. However, they are least satisfied with the level of flexibility in their work environments.

These findings highlight the importance of implementing a flexible work system in primary healthcare facilities to enhance job satisfaction and improve retention among healthcare workers. While most healthcare professionals in the primary healthcare sector express moderate to high levels of job satisfaction, there are specific areas that require attention, such as professional opportunities, workload, recognition rewards, and work environment flexibility. Addressing these concerns can contribute to improved job satisfaction, which certainly will enhance employees' well-being and retention of healthcare personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a foundation for identifying factors that contribute to job satisfaction among healthcare professionals in primary healthcare centers in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. To enhance retention and improve the quality of care, it is advisable to prioritize the evaluation and enhancement of job satisfaction among these professionals. This will ultimately benefit the health of patients and clients in primary healthcare centers.

Implementing recreational initiatives that target job satisfaction among primary healthcare providers and incorporating relevant research findings can address the key factors influencing employee satisfaction. Enhancing job satisfaction among primary healthcare workers in the Eastern region should be a top priority, and one way to achieve this is by providing greater work flexibility.

It is highly recommended to conduct a similar study in Saudi Arabia utilizing randomized samples and investing more in-depth qualitative research to gather more reliable findings and detailed opinions from employees about job satisfaction. This study should include participants from different regions to obtain more comprehensive information about the factors and predictors of job satisfaction among primary healthcare professionals in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia.

IMPLICATIONS

This study can be used to identify the main sources of dissatisfaction among primary healthcare workers in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. By addressing these aspects, institutions can strive to improve employee satisfaction and retain skilled primary healthcare professionals in their facilities. Furthermore, conducting a detailed examination of the specific factors contributing to job satisfaction can help develop tailored strategies and recreational initiatives designed to enhance job satisfaction among primary healthcare personnel in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitations of the present study include the use of convenience sampling for sample selection and the adoption of a cross-sectional research design. It is strongly recommended to conduct further research specifically targeting these limitations. This future investigation should include a broader and more diverse sample from multiple regions in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, employing a longitudinal research design and using a randomized sampling strategy would yield more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researchers affirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study project.

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