



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Employee Retention in the Public Healthcare Sector Using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

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Employee retention is a critical challenge in the public healthcare sector, where high turnover rates can undermine the quality of patient care and strain organizational resources. This study aims to develop a conceptual framework to enhance employee retention in the public healthcare sector by applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The framework is grounded in previous empirical findings and identifies key factors such as work-life balance, training and development opportunities, supervisor support, team cohesion, job autonomy, and work environment as significant influencers of retention. These factors were selected based on their relevance to public healthcare settings, where resource constraints and high job demands are prevalent. The proposed conceptual framework integrates both hygiene factors, which prevent job dissatisfaction, and motivators, which enhance job satisfaction in order to provide a holistic approach to retention. By improving working conditions, fostering professional growth, and promoting a supportive work environment, the framework offers practical strategies for healthcare administrators to reduce turnover rates. This study's main contribution lies in its adaptation of Herzberg's theory to the specific challenges of public sector healthcare, providing a targeted, evidence-based approach to improve employee retention and ensure the sustainability of the healthcare workforce.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Employee retention is a cornerstone of stability and effectiveness in healthcare systems globally, especially within the public sector. Retaining skilful healthcare professionals is crucial for ensuring continuous and high-quality patient care, which is vital for positive health outcomes and operational efficiency (Balang & Fradelos, 2021). The global healthcare sector is increasingly grappling with the challenge of retaining skilful professionals, a situation exacerbated by the aging global population that heightens the demand for healthcare services and strains resources (Willie, 2023). Consequently, retaining healthcare workers is a matter of public interest, crucial for sustaining community health, and ensuring the vitality of healthcare systems (Fitts et al., 2021). The challenges faced in retaining healthcare employees are multifaceted. Work-life balance is a significant concern, as healthcare professionals often work long hours under high stress, leading to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Mi & Rosli, n.d.). Additionally, opportunities for career advancement and continuous professional development are limited in the public sector compared to private healthcare, contributing to higher turnover rates (Chen & Wu, 2020). Inadequate supervisor support, lack of team cohesion, and poor working conditions further exacerbate these issues, making it difficult for public healthcare institutions to retain their workforce (Guettler, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee retention to develop effective strategies.

The broader implications of employee retention extend beyond the healthcare workforce to the quality of patient care and overall healthcare services. High turnover rates disrupt the continuity of care, causing fragmented patient services and potentially deteriorating health outcomes (Owens & Ba, 2021). Moreover, the financial burden associated with recruiting and training new staff can strain already limited resources, diverting funds from patient care to administrative expenses (Crayton, 2020). Ensuring the retention of healthcare employees is thus critical not only for maintaining a competent and experienced workforce but also for sustaining the financial and operational stability of healthcare institutions. Consequently, understanding and addressing the factors influencing employee retention is vital for improving the public healthcare system's resilience and capacity to provide high-quality care.

## **2.1 Problem statement**

Employee retention is a critical issue in the healthcare sector, particularly in the public domain, where the demand for skilful professionals is increasing, yet resources and support often lag behind. Retaining healthcare workers is essential for ensuring continuity of care, maintaining high standards of patient outcomes, and sustaining the overall operational efficiency of healthcare institutions (Balang & Fradelos, 2021). Despite the recognized importance of employee retention, public sector healthcare institutions worldwide continue to struggle with high turnover rates. This challenge is exacerbated by the multifaceted stressors inherent in the healthcare profession, such as long working hours, insufficient work-life balance, and limited opportunities for professional development (Mi & Rosli, n.d.; Chen & Wu, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these pressures, leading to increased burnout and exacerbating the turnover crisis in healthcare settings globally (World Health Organization, 2022). In Malaysia, employee retention in the public sector healthcare is a particularly pressing issue. The country's healthcare sector faces unique challenges, including an aging workforce, rising demand for healthcare services, and limited financial and human resources (Shabbeer, 2023). The stressors experienced by Malaysian healthcare professionals, such as excessive workloads, inadequate supervisor support, and poor working conditions, contribute to a working environment that is both physically and emotionally taxing (Li et al., 2020). These conditions make it increasingly difficult for public healthcare institutions to retain their workforce, leading to disruptions in patient care and significant financial burdens due to the high cost of recruiting and training new staff (Crayton, 2020). Addressing these issues is critical for improving the resilience and sustainability of Malaysia's public healthcare system.

## **2.2 Gap**

Despite the extensive body of research on employee retention in healthcare, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory within the context of Malaysia's public healthcare sector. While previous studies have explored various factors influencing the retention of healthcare professionals, the integration of Herzberg's framework, which differentiates between hygiene factors and motivators, remains underutilized in this specific context (Ali & Anwar, 2021). This gap is significant because Herzberg's theory offers a nuanced approach to understanding the dual aspects of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, which are critical for developing effective healthcare professionals' retention strategies. By applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to the public healthcare sector in Malaysia, this study aims to fill this gap and provide a conceptual framework that can guide the development of targeted interventions to improve employee retention in this vital sector.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITIONS**

### **2.3 Employee retention**

Employee retention is a critical issue in the healthcare sector, particularly within public sector institutions where resources are often limited, and the demand for services is continuously rising (Pemer & Werr, 2023). The retention of skilful healthcare professionals is not only essential for ensuring continuity of care but also plays a pivotal role in maintaining high standards of patient outcomes and operational efficiency. High turnover rates can disrupt these objectives, leading to a cascade of negative impacts, including compromised patient care, increased workload for remaining staff, and significant financial costs related to recruiting and training new employees (Dill & Duffy,

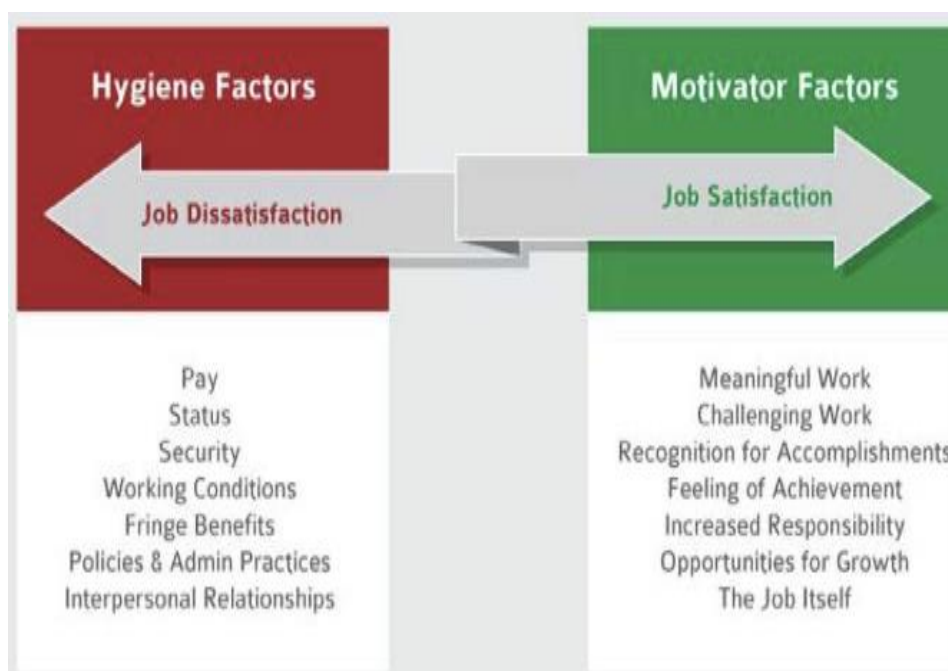
2022). Therefore, the ability to retain employees is intrinsically linked to both operational efficiency and the overall health of the healthcare system. However, the issue of employee retention in public healthcare is complex and multifaceted. While ensuring continuity of care is a primary goal, the factors that influence retention extend beyond simple operational needs. Research has consistently highlighted that work-life balance is a primary factor influencing retention, with long working hours and high stress on the job often causing burnout and an increase in turnover intentions (Stimpfel et al., 2020). This suggests that while operational efficiency is crucial, it cannot be achieved sustainably without addressing the well-being of healthcare workers. Moreover, opportunities for professional development and career advancement are critical in retaining healthcare employees. These opportunities provide employees with a sense of progression and investment in their future, which are essential for maintaining job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chen & Wu, 2020). However, in the public sector, these opportunities are often limited due to bureaucratic constraints and resource shortages, exacerbating the challenges of retention. The lack of career advancement can lead to job dissatisfaction and turnover, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address this gap. Supervisor support and positive workplace relationships also play a significant role in employee retention. A supportive and cohesive work environment is crucial for fostering job satisfaction and reducing turnover rates (Mottaghi et al., 2020). In the public healthcare context, however, high patient loads and limited resources can strain relationships, creating a work environment that is not conducive to employee retention. The role of leadership in this context is critical, as effective supervision and strong workplace relationships can mitigate the negative impacts of these stressors. In Malaysia, the public healthcare sector faces additional challenges that further complicate healthcare workers' retention efforts. Limited resources, high patient loads, and bureaucratic constraints are prevalent issues that exacerbate job stress and contribute to high turnover rates (Shabbeer, 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of understanding the specific constituents that influence healthcare workers' retention in this context. A nuanced approach that considers the unique pressures faced by Malaysian healthcare workers is necessary to develop effective retention strategies that improve job satisfaction and emotional well-being. This study seeks to address these issues by providing a comprehensive analysis of the key factors influencing employee retention in the Malaysian public healthcare sector. By applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to the analysis, this study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how hygiene factors and motivators interact in this specific context, ultimately guiding the development of targeted strategies to enhance healthcare workers' retention and ensure the sustainability of healthcare services in Malaysia.

#### **2.4 Herzberg's two-factor theory**

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, is a well-established framework for understanding employee satisfaction and retention. According to Thant and Chang (2021), this theory posits that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction arise from two distinct sets of factors. Hygiene factors, such as company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions, do not inherently motivate employees but can cause dissatisfaction if they are inadequate. Conversely, motivators such as recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself are intrinsic to the job and can significantly enhance job satisfaction and motivation when present (Herzberg, 1966). In the context of healthcare, Herzberg's theory provides valuable insights into the dual nature of job satisfaction and retention. However, its applicability in complex and resource-constrained environments like public sector healthcare settings raises important questions. For instance, Ali and Anwar (2021) argue that while addressing hygiene factors is crucial for establishing a baseline level of satisfaction, achieving even this baseline can be challenging in public healthcare settings with limited resources. Poor working conditions, inadequate salary, and insufficient administrative support are common problems that arise in such environments, leading to high levels of job dissatisfaction and an increase in job turnover (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Thus, while Herzberg's theory highlights the importance of these factors, its practical application in under-resourced healthcare environments may be constrained by systemic limitations. Conversely, motivators play a critical role in enhancing job satisfaction and encouraging long-term commitment among healthcare workers. Basalamah and As'ad (2021) emphasize that opportunities for professional development, recognition of achievements, and an increase in responsibilities can significantly boost morale and job satisfaction. However, the implementation of these motivators in

public healthcare settings can be problematic. According to Sharma et al. (2021), the rigid structures and limited financial resources in the public sector often restrict the availability of professional development opportunities and other intrinsic motivators. This limitation has raised some concerns about the effectiveness of Herzberg's motivators in these contexts, suggesting that while they are theoretically sound, their impact may be diminished in environments where systemic barriers limit their implementation.

Applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, illustrated in Figure 1, to the context of the public healthcare sector in Malaysia highlights both the potential and the limitations of this framework. Shabbeer (2023) notes that public healthcare institutions often face challenges such as high patient loads and bureaucratic constraints, which can negatively impact both hygiene factors and motivators. While improving working conditions and ensuring fair compensation are essential steps, the ability to implement these changes in the public sector may be limited, resulting in ongoing dissatisfaction and turnover. This raises the question of whether Herzberg's theory, though insightful, can be fully adaptable to the unique pressures of public sector healthcare environments. This study aims to utilize Herzberg's framework to identify specific strategies that can be effectively implemented in public sector healthcare settings, while also critically assessing its applicability in fostering a more satisfied and stable healthcare workforce in Malaysia's public sector.



**Figure 1: Herzberg's two-factor theory (Thant & Chang, 2021)**

## 2.5 Previous studies

Numerous studies have focused on employee retention in the healthcare sector, highlighting various factors that influence healthcare professionals' decisions to remain in their positions. Previous research has extensively examined the roles of work-life balance, training and development opportunities, supervisor support, team cohesion, job autonomy, and work environment in shaping job satisfaction and retention. By reviewing these studies, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature, identify gaps, and establish a foundation for the current research on employee retention in the public healthcare sector in Malaysia.

### 2.3.1 Work-life balance

Work-life balance is a crucial factor influencing employee retention in the healthcare sector. Healthcare professionals often face demanding work schedules that include long hours, night shifts, and unpredictable workloads, which can lead to significant stress and burnout (Gribben & Semple, 2021). The ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities is essential for maintaining job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions. Studies have shown that employees who

experience better work-life balance report higher levels of job satisfaction and are more likely to stay with their employers (Ostrom et al., 2021). The strain of long working hours can be particularly pronounced in the public sector, where resources are often stretched thin, making it imperative for healthcare organizations to prioritize work-life balance initiatives. Implementing policies that promote flexible working hours, offering childcare support, and ensuring adequate rest periods can help improve work-life balance and enhance employee retention in public healthcare settings. Flexible scheduling allows employees to manage their personal and professional commitments more effectively, reducing stress, and increasing overall job satisfaction (Harini et al., 2020). Additionally, providing access to mental health resources and promoting a supportive work culture can mitigate the negative effects of job stress and burnout. Healthcare organizations that invest in work-life balance initiatives not only improve the well-being of their employees but also foster a more loyal and committed workforce, ultimately enhancing retention rates and the quality of patient care (Rollins et al., 2021).

### **2.3.2 Training and development opportunities**

Opportunities for professional growth and development are vital for retaining healthcare employees, as they directly impact job satisfaction and career progression. Continuous education and career advancement opportunities not only enhance employees' skills and knowledge but also provide a sense of progression and purpose, which are essential for long-term job satisfaction (Makri & Vlachopoulos, 2020). Healthcare professionals who perceive their organization as invested in their professional growth are more likely to remain loyal and committed. Training programs, workshops, and certification courses can motivate employees by recognizing their achievements and preparing them for future roles. Such initiatives can make employees feel valued and invested in their future within the organization, thereby reducing turnover rates (Nifakos et al., 2021). In the public healthcare sector, where resources can be limited, providing ample training and development opportunities is particularly crucial. Investing in the continuous professional development of healthcare workers can help address skill gaps and ensure that the workforce remains competent and capable of meeting evolving healthcare demands (Chen et al., 2023). Additionally, mentoring programs and leadership training can prepare employees for higher responsibilities and foster a culture of continuous improvement and professional excellence. Organizations that prioritize training and development create an environment of growth and advancement, which not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens employee retention. By supporting the professional development of their staff, public healthcare institutions can build a more competent, motivated, and loyal workforce, ultimately leading to improvements in patient care and organizational stability (Schilling & Randolph, 2021).

### **2.3.3 Supervisor support**

Supervisor support is a critical determinant of employee retention, significantly influencing job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Effective leadership and supportive supervision can create a positive work environment, fostering trust and open communication between supervisors and employees (McIlroy et al., 2021). Supervisors who provide regular feedback, recognize employees' efforts, as well as offer guidance and mentorship can help mitigate job stress and enhance employee morale. Research indicates that employees who feel supported by their supervisors are more likely to experience job satisfaction, exhibit loyalty to their organization, and reduce employee turnover intentions (Riley et al., 2021). In contrast, a lack of support and poor communication can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction, driving employees to leave organizations faster. In the public healthcare sector, where high stress and demanding work conditions are common, the role of supervisors becomes even more crucial. Supervisors who are approachable and empathetic can significantly impact their team's well-being and job satisfaction. Implementing mentorship programs, providing leadership training for supervisors, and encouraging a culture of recognition can enhance the support system within healthcare organizations (Khairy et al., 2023). Additionally, fostering a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and understood can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention. By strengthening supervisor support, public healthcare institutions can create a more resilient and committed workforce, ultimately improving patient care and organizational effectiveness (Rahman, 2020).

### 2.3.4 Team cohesion

Team cohesion or the quality of relationships and collaboration among colleagues within a workplace, plays a pivotal role in influencing employee retention. A cohesive team fosters a supportive and harmonious work environment, which is essential for job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions (Rikhi & Mehta, 2021). When healthcare professionals feel connected to their team and experience positive interpersonal interactions, they are more likely to remain in their positions. Strong team cohesion can mitigate the adverse effects of job stress as employees can rely on their colleagues for emotional and professional support. This sense of camaraderie and mutual trust not only enhances job satisfaction but also contributes to a more engaged and committed workforce (Zhang et al., 2021). In public healthcare settings, promoting team cohesion is particularly important due to the high-stress environments and demanding workloads that healthcare professionals often face. Team-building activities, regular team meetings, and open communication channels can strengthen relationships among staff members and foster a culture of collaboration (Shabbeer, 2023). Additionally, creating opportunities for multidisciplinary teamwork can enhance the sense of unity and collective purpose within the organization. Encouraging team-based approaches to problem-solving and decision-making can further enhance cohesion and ensure that all team members feel valued and included. By investing in strategies to improve team cohesion, public healthcare institutions can create a more positive work environment that supports employee retention and improves the overall quality of patient care (Rikhi & Mehta, 2021).

### 2.3.5 Job autonomy

Job autonomy or the degree of control employees have over their work tasks and decisions, is a significant factor influencing job satisfaction and employee retention. In the healthcare sector, professionals who are granted autonomy in their roles are more likely to feel empowered and valued, which enhances their commitment to the organization (Khalil et al., 2022). Autonomy allows healthcare workers to use their expertise and judgment in patient care, leading to a greater sense of responsibility and job satisfaction. Research indicates that high levels of job autonomy are associated with increased job motivation, lower stress levels, and reduced turnover intentions (Dodanwala & Santoso, 2022). When employees have the freedom to make decisions and manage their work, they are more engaged and invested in their roles, contributing to a stable and motivated workforce. In public healthcare settings, promoting job autonomy can be particularly challenging due to bureaucratic constraints and standardized procedures. However, implementing policies that allow for greater flexibility and decision-making can significantly improve job satisfaction among healthcare professionals (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). For instance, involving staff in decision-making processes, providing opportunities for independent practice, and encouraging innovative approaches to patient care can enhance the sense of autonomy. Additionally, creating a supportive environment where employees feel trusted and respected can further reinforce the benefits of job autonomy. By fostering a culture that values and promotes autonomy, public healthcare institutions can improve employee retention, leading to a more resilient and effective healthcare workforce (Brough et al., 2020).

### 2.3.6 Work environment

The work environment encompasses both the physical and psychological conditions of the workplace, significantly impacting employee satisfaction and retention. In the healthcare sector, a positive work environment is crucial for ensuring that healthcare professionals can perform their duties effectively and feel supported in their roles. Factors such as adequate facilities, access to necessary medical equipment, and a safe and clean working environment are essential for minimizing stress and preventing burnout (Putri et al., 2023). Additionally, a supportive work culture that promotes teamwork, communication, and respect among colleagues can enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates (Rollins et al., 2021). Healthcare organizations that invest in creating a conducive work environment can foster a sense of stability and loyalty among their employees. Conversely, poor working conditions can lead to dissatisfaction, increased stress levels, and higher turnover intentions among healthcare workers. Issues such as inadequate staffing, insufficient resources, and unsafe work environments can exacerbate job stress and negatively affect employee morale (Seo et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a proactive approach from healthcare administrators to ensure that the work environment meets the needs of their staff. This may include

regular assessments of workplace conditions, investments in infrastructure improvements, and initiatives to promote a positive organizational culture (Shen et al., 2023). By prioritizing the work environment, public healthcare institutions can create a more supportive and efficient workplace, ultimately enhancing employee retention and improving the quality of patient care.

## **2.6 Relationship between Herzberg's two-factor theory and employee retention**

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the factors that influence employee retention, particularly in the healthcare sector. According to Herzberg, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction arise from two distinct sets of factors: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, such as recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth, are intrinsic to the job and can significantly enhance job satisfaction when present. Hygiene factors, such as salary, company policies, working conditions, and supervision, do not inherently motivate employees but can lead to dissatisfaction if they are inadequate (Herzberg, 1966). Applying this theory to the context of healthcare, it becomes clear that both sets of factors must be addressed to improve retention rates among healthcare professionals. Motivators play a crucial role in enhancing job satisfaction and encouraging long-term commitment among healthcare workers. Opportunities for professional development, recognition of achievements, and increased responsibilities can significantly boost morale and job satisfaction (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021). For example, providing healthcare workers with opportunities for continuing education and career advancement can fulfill their intrinsic needs for growth and self-actualization, leading to higher retention rates. Recognizing the contributions of healthcare professionals through awards and positive feedback can also enhance their sense of accomplishment and loyalty to the organization (Shabbeer, 2023). When employees feel that their efforts and contributions are acknowledged and that they have a clear path for career progression, they are more likely to remain with their employer, thereby reducing turnover rates. Conversely, hygiene factors are essential for preventing job dissatisfaction and ensuring a baseline level of contentment among employees. In the healthcare sector, this includes providing competitive salaries, safe and well-equipped working conditions, and effective supervision (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Addressing these hygiene factors is crucial for creating a supportive work environment that minimizes stress and prevents burnout. For instance, ensuring that healthcare facilities are adequately staffed and ensure employees have access to the necessary resources can reduce job-related frustrations and enhance job satisfaction (Dill & Duffy, 2022). Additionally, fostering a positive work culture with strong interpersonal relationships and supportive supervision can further mitigate dissatisfaction. By addressing both motivators and hygiene factors, healthcare organizations can create a more satisfied and stable workforce, ultimately improving employee retention and the quality of patient care (Duffield et al., 2020).

## **2.7 Proposed conceptual framework**

The proposed conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between various factors and employee retention within the public healthcare sector. This framework identifies six key independent variables: work-life balance, training and development opportunities, supervisor support, team cohesion, job autonomy, and work environment, all of which play a crucial role in influencing employee retention. Work-life balance is a significant factor in determining employee retention, especially in the healthcare sector where professionals often face demanding schedules and high-stress environments. Research indicates that healthcare workers who manage to balance their professional and personal lives effectively are less likely to experience job burnout and are more inclined to stay with their employers (Ostrom et al., 2021). Flexible work schedules, adequate rest periods, and supportive policies that allow employees to manage their personal responsibilities alongside their professional duties can greatly enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates (Harini et al., 2020). Opportunities for training and development are essential for the professional growth and satisfaction of healthcare employees. Providing continuous education and career advancement opportunities not only enhances the skills and knowledge of healthcare workers but also gives them a sense of progression and purpose (Makri & Vlachopoulos, 2020). Organizations that invest in the professional development of their staff are likely to see higher retention rates as employees feel valued and supported in their career aspirations. Training programs, workshops, and certification courses can motivate employees by recognizing their achievements and preparing them for future roles, thereby reducing turnover intentions (Chen et al., 2023).

Effective supervision and support from supervisors are critical for maintaining high levels of job satisfaction and employee retention. Supervisors who provide regular feedback, recognize the efforts of their employees, and offer guidance can significantly enhance the work environment and mitigate job stress (Rahman, 2020). In contrast, a lack of supervisor support can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among employees, increasing the likelihood of turnover (Riley et al., 2021). Therefore, fostering strong supervisory relationships and implementing mentorship programs are essential strategies for improving employee retention in the healthcare sector. Team cohesion, or the quality of relationships and collaboration among colleagues, is another important factor influencing employee retention. A supportive and harmonious team environment can mitigate the adverse effects of job stress and enhance job satisfaction (Rikhi & Mehta, 2021). When healthcare professionals feel connected to their team and experience positive interpersonal interactions, they are more likely to remain in their positions. Team-building activities, regular team meetings, and open communication channels can strengthen relationships among staff members and foster a culture of collaboration, thereby improving retention rates (Shabbeer, 2023). Job autonomy, which refers to the degree of control employees have over their work tasks and decisions, is a significant factor influencing job satisfaction and retention. Healthcare professionals who are granted autonomy in their roles are more likely to feel empowered and valued, which enhances their commitment to the organization (Khalil et al., 2022). Autonomy allows healthcare workers to use their expertise and judgment in patient care, leading to a greater sense of responsibility and job satisfaction. High levels of job autonomy are associated with increased job motivation, lower stress levels, and reduced turnover intentions (Brough et al., 2020).

The work environment encompasses both the physical and psychological conditions of the workplace, significantly impacting employee satisfaction and retention. A positive work environment that includes adequate facilities, access to necessary medical equipment, as well as a safe and clean working environment is essential for minimizing stress and preventing burnout (Putri et al., 2023). Additionally, a supportive work culture that promotes teamwork, communication, and respect among colleagues can enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates (Seo et al., 2020). Healthcare organizations that invest in creating a conducive work environment can foster a sense of stability and loyalty among their employees, thereby improving retention. In summary, the proposed conceptual framework underscores the importance of addressing multiple factors to improve employee retention in the public healthcare sector. By focusing on work-life balance, training and development opportunities, supervisor support, team cohesion, job autonomy, as well as work environment, healthcare organizations can create a more supportive and satisfying workplace, ultimately enhancing employee retention and the overall quality of patient care. Hence, the following propositions are made:

**P1:** There is a significant relationship between work-life balance and employee retention.

Work-life balance is consistently highlighted in the literature as a critical determinant of employee retention, especially in high-stress environments such as healthcare. According to Stimpfel et al. (2020), healthcare professionals who experience better work-life balance are less likely to suffer from burnout, which in turn reduces their intention to leave the organization. In the context of public healthcare, where resources are limited and workloads are high, achieving a work-life balance can be challenging, which makes this factor particularly relevant. While work-life balance is generally seen as beneficial, some studies suggest that other factors, such as financial incentives or job security, might play a more significant role in retention, especially in environments where work-life balance is difficult to achieve (Ostrom et al., 2021). However, this proposition posits that despite these challenges, work-life balance remains a key factor in retaining healthcare employees.

**P2:** There is a significant relationship between training and development opportunities and employee retention.

Training and development opportunities are crucial for employee retention as they provide healthcare workers with the skills and knowledge needed for career advancement and personal growth. Chen and Wu (2020) argue that employees who perceive their organization as being invested in their professional development are more likely to remain committed to their roles. In the public healthcare sector, where career advancement opportunities are limited by bureaucratic constraints,



providing training and development can be a powerful motivator for retention. However, some alternative perspectives suggest that in environments where career advancement is limited, factors like job security or organizational culture may have a stronger influence on retention (Makri & Vlachopoulos, 2020). Nonetheless, this proposition emphasizes the importance of training and development as a retention strategy, particularly in the public sector, where opportunities for growth are otherwise limited.

**P3:** There is a significant relationship between supervisor support and employee retention.

Supervisor support is a critical factor in employee retention as positive supervisory relationships can enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions. Mottaghi et al. (2020) highlight that effective supervision, characterized by regular feedback, recognition, and guidance, creates a supportive work environment that fosters loyalty and commitment. In the public healthcare sector, where the work environment can be particularly stressful, the role of supervisors becomes even more crucial in mitigating stress and preventing burnout. However, an alternative view suggests that in highly hierarchical or bureaucratic organizations, the impact of supervisor support might be diminished, with organizational policies or work conditions playing a more decisive role in retention (Rahman, 2020). Despite this, the proposition maintains that supervisor support is a significant factor in retaining healthcare employees, particularly in environments where direct managerial relationships can greatly influence employee morale.

**P4:** There is a significant relationship between team cohesion and employee retention.

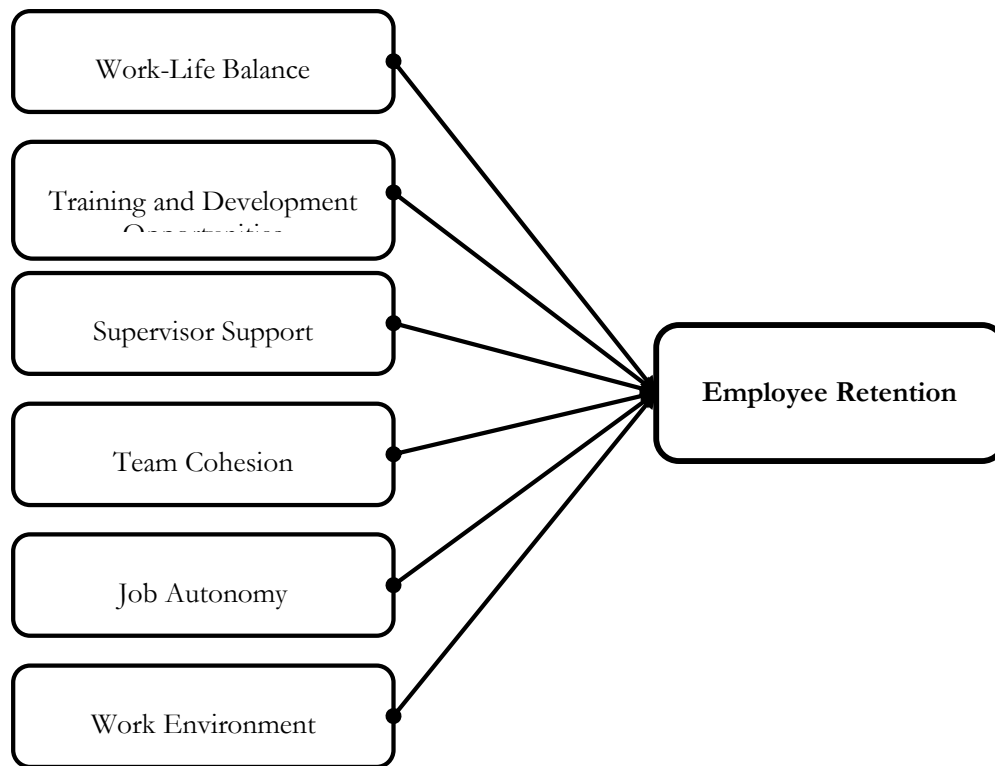
Team cohesion or the quality of relationships and collaboration among colleagues is another important factor influencing employee retention. Rikhi and Mehta (2021) suggest that a cohesive team environment fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support, which can mitigate job stress and enhance job satisfaction. In the context of public healthcare, where professionals often work under pressure, strong team cohesion can act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress, thereby promoting retention. However, it is worth considering that in some cases, external factors such as workload or administrative support might override the benefits of team cohesion, particularly in under-resourced settings (Zhang et al., 2021). Despite this, the proposition asserts that team cohesion is vital for retaining employees, especially in high-pressure environments like public healthcare.

**P5:** There is a significant relationship between job autonomy and employee retention.

Job autonomy, which refers to the degree of control employees have over their work tasks and decisions, is closely linked to job satisfaction and retention. Khalil et al. (2022) argue that healthcare professionals who have greater autonomy in their roles are more likely to feel empowered and valued, which enhances their commitment to the organization. In public healthcare settings, where bureaucratic constraints can limit autonomy, promoting job autonomy is challenging but remains crucial for retention. However, some perspectives suggest that in highly regulated environments, other factors such as job security or compensation may have a more immediate impact on retention (Brough et al., 2020). Despite these considerations, this proposition emphasizes the importance of job autonomy as a factor that can significantly improve retention rates in the public healthcare sector.

**P6:** There is a significant relationship between work environment and employee retention.

The work environment, encompassing both physical and psychological conditions, plays a significant role in employee retention. Putri et al. (2023) emphasize that a positive work environment, characterized by adequate facilities, safety, and a supportive culture, is essential for minimizing stress and preventing burnout. In public healthcare, where resources are often stretched, the work environment can significantly impact employee morale and retention. However, it is also argued that in environments where the physical conditions are less than ideal, other factors such as leadership quality or team cohesion might have a stronger influence on retention (Shen et al., 2023). Nonetheless, this proposition highlights the work environment as a critical factor in retaining healthcare employees, particularly in settings where improving these conditions can directly influence job satisfaction and commitment. Based on the aforementioned propositions, the authors present the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Proposed conceptual framework**

The proposed conceptual framework for enhancing employee retention in public-sector healthcare settings is grounded in well-established empirical research. Studies by Ostrom et al. (2021) as well as Chen and Wu (2020) have demonstrated that work-life balance and training opportunities are critical factors influencing retention in various healthcare environments. For example, Ostrom et al. (2021) reveal that healthcare professionals in the United States who have better work-life balance tend to exhibit significantly lower turnover rates. Similarly, Chen and Wu (2020) report that continuous professional development is a key factor in retaining healthcare staff in both the public and private sectors in China. To demonstrate the practical application of the framework, consider a hypothetical scenario in a Malaysian public hospital, where high turnover rates are linked to poor work-life balance and inadequate training opportunities. By implementing the framework, the hospital can introduce flexible working hours and invest in regular training programs, which have been shown to reduce turnover in similar settings globally (Stimpfel et al., 2020; Makri & Vlachopoulos, 2020). These approaches not only align with the empirical evidence but also highlight the framework's potential to address real-world challenges in employee retention. Additionally, incorporating case studies from other countries that have successfully addressed similar challenges can further validate the framework. For instance, a case study from the UK's NHS, where job autonomy initiatives are implemented to reduce nurse turnover, can be referenced to show how enhancing job autonomy can lead to improved retention (Khalil et al., 2022). By connecting the framework to these empirical studies and real-world examples, the relevance and applicability of the framework in different contexts are emphasized.

## 2.8 Adapting the framework to different cultural and healthcare settings

Although the proposed conceptual framework is tailored to the Malaysian public healthcare sector in mind, its principles are universally applicable across various cultural and healthcare settings. However, adaptation to local contexts is essential to ensure its effectiveness globally. For instance, in high-income countries with more developed healthcare systems, such as those in Europe or North America, the emphasis might shift towards enhancing motivators like job autonomy and professional development as these areas are often more valued in such settings. In contrast, in lower-income countries or regions with under-resourced healthcare systems, the focus is addressing basic hygiene factors, such as improving working conditions and ensuring fair compensation, which are often the primary concerns (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Cultural differences also play a crucial role in determining

how these factors are prioritized. In collectivist cultures, such as those in many Asian or African countries, team cohesion, and supervisor support might be more critical for employee retention as these cultures place a higher value on group harmony and hierarchical relationships (Shabbeer, 2023). On the other hand, in individualistic cultures, such as those in Western countries, factors like job autonomy and work-life balance might take priority. Moreover, the framework can be adapted to address specific challenges in different healthcare systems. For example, in countries facing a shortage of healthcare professionals, the framework might emphasize training and development opportunities to build a sustainable workforce. In contrast, in countries dealing with an aging healthcare workforce, the focus might shift towards improving work-life balance and reducing physical and emotional burnout among older employees. In summary, while the conceptual framework is rooted in the Malaysian public healthcare context, its adaptability across different cultural and healthcare settings makes it a versatile tool for addressing global challenges in employee retention. By tailoring the framework to the unique needs and priorities of each setting, healthcare administrators can effectively enhance their employees' retention and ensure the sustainability of their healthcare workforce.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Employee retention in the public healthcare sector is a complex and multifaceted issue that necessitates a comprehensive and strategic approach for effective resolution. The present article has made significant contributions by identifying and analyzing key factors influencing employee retention, including work-life balance, training and development opportunities, supervisor support, team cohesion, job autonomy, and work environment. Each of these factors plays a crucial role in shaping the job satisfaction and commitment of healthcare professionals, underscoring the importance of targeted strategies to enhance employee retention. By integrating these factors into a cohesive conceptual framework, this study provides both theoretical and practical insights that can guide healthcare organizations in improving workforce stability and effectiveness. The application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory within this framework is particularly valuable for understanding the dual role of hygiene factors and motivators in employee retention. The study highlights that while improving working conditions and providing adequate support are essential for preventing dissatisfaction, it is equally important to offer professional development opportunities and recognize employee achievements to boost job satisfaction and loyalty. This dual approach not only addresses immediate concerns related to job dissatisfaction but also fosters long-term commitment and engagement among healthcare workers. The proposed conceptual framework integrates these theoretical insights and provides a practical guide for healthcare administrators. By focusing on enhancing work-life balance, offering continuous training and development opportunities, fostering supportive supervision, promoting team cohesion, granting job autonomy, and creating a positive work environment, healthcare organizations can address both hygiene factors and motivators effectively. This holistic approach is essential for creating a work environment that not only retains employees but also promotes their overall well-being and professional growth. The framework offers a robust tool for healthcare leaders aiming to improve employee retention and ensure the sustainability of their workforce. However, the proposed framework has some limitations. One potential limitation is its reliance on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which, while widely respected, may not fully encompass the complexities of employee retention in resource-constrained environments such as public healthcare. Additionally, the framework's applicability across different cultural and healthcare settings may vary, necessitating adaptations to local contexts. Future research should explore these limitations by examining the effectiveness of the framework in diverse settings and considering alternative theoretical perspectives that might better consider the unique challenges faced by public healthcare organizations. In conclusion, effectively addressing employee retention in the public healthcare sector requires a strategic and multifaceted approach that integrates both theoretical insights and practical considerations. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive framework for healthcare administrators aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover rates. Future research should continue to build on these findings by exploring the framework's applicability in different contexts and developing innovative solutions to further enhance employee retention in this vital sector.

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