Emotional Intelligence and Turnover Intentions among Ugandan Nurses: The Moderating Role of Workplace Stress

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interplay between emotional intelligence (EI) and turnover intentions (TOI) among Ugandan nurses, with a focus on the moderating role of workplace stress (WS). A correlational survey research design was utilized, employing a quantitative approach with a standard closed-ended self-administered questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 123 nurses. The data were entered into the computer using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 27 (IBM SPSS) and the moderating role was tested using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022) through model 1.

The results indicated that workplace moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. The results imply that stress weakens the positive impact of emotional intelligence on reducing turnover intentions which means that even emotionally intelligent nurses may consider leaving when stress levels are high. Therefore, employers and other people managers need to prioritize stress-reduction programs such as mindfulness training, adequate rest periods, and supportive supervision to allow nurses' emotional intelligence to function effectively.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Workplace Stress, Turnover Intentions

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary healthcare givers deliver their services under high-pressure environments that demand their emotional capacity to be as critical as their clinical competences. Yet, the extent to which emotional intelligence protects nurses from turnover under stress remains insufficiently understood. The global shortage of nursing professionals has become a critical concern with significant implications for the delivery of high-quality healthcare services (Majeed & Jamshed, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the widespread shortage of health workers, particularly nurses, who account for more than 50% of the current shortfall in healthcare personnel. The most substantial shortages of nurses are observed in South East Asia and Africa, where the need for these professionals is particularly pronounced (WHO, 2022). Emotional Intelligence (EI) is crucial in helping nurses manage work-related stress, which directly impacts their turnover intentions. Sadovyy et al. (2021) highlight that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better at recognizing and managing their emotions during stressful situations. They are also more supportive and helpful to others affected by stress, making them more adaptable to stress and disruptive emotions. Conversely, those with lower emotional intelligence may struggle with emotional recognition and management, exacerbating stress and its consequences. Nurses with high levels of emotional intelligence exhibit lower levels of turnover intentions due to their enhanced ability to manage stress effectively (Wang et al., 2022).

Similarly, Iguchi (2016) found that high demands in addition to low resources predicted turnover intention among public health nurses. Turnover intention represents the preliminary stage in the decision-making process that precedes actual resignation. It is commonly reflected through an employee's intention to leave the organization. It provides a subjective assessment of an employee's likelihood or willingness to leave their current position within a specified period of time (Ramadhan, & Nasution, 2023). Many instances, employee turnover

is attributed to workplace stress which arises not only from inadequate organizational support such as perceived unfairness or poor working conditions but also from emotional and physical fatigue experienced by employees.

Additionally, turnover intentions, interchangeably referred to as intention to leave or quit reflect an employee's subjective likelihood of seeking alternative job opportunities. Factors contributing to turnover intentions include thoughts of quitting, job search intentions, and the inclination to quit (Varshney, 2014). Turnover intention, often resulting from unsatisfactory and stressful working conditions as well as work overload, poses significant challenges for healthcare institutions (Yildiz et al., 2021). The prevalence of turnover intention among nurses is notably high (Gebregziabher et al., 2020; Galanis, Moisoglou, et al., 2024). Nurses, as frontline healthcare workers, have faced substantial challenges during the pandemic, including burnout, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (Galanis et al., 2023). To counteract the turnover, the pphysical and emotional fatigue due to work stress and emotional pressure can be minimized by the presence of a high level of emotional intelligence in an employee (Cheung et al., 2016; Ramadhan, & Nasution, 2023).

Turnover intention among nurses is a critical concern because it contributes to longer working hours for remaining staff, increases the costs associated with nurse turnover, leads to financial losses, results in the departure of trained personnel, and negatively impacts the quality of service delivery (Takase, 2010). Earlier studies revealed a strong and direct significant relationship between workplace and employee turnover intentions (Burki et al., 2020; Salama et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2025). Specifically, an increase in workplace was found to be associated with an increase in employees' intentions to leave the organization.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

This study investigated the interaction between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions among Ugandan nurses with focus on the moderating role of workplace stress, based on the Job Demands–Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hu et al., 2011), explaining that work environments characterised by job demands such as high workload, emotional demands, time pressure interact with job resources like social support, autonomy, feedback. The model emphasizes that when job demands are excessive and resources are insufficient, employees undergo a health-impairment process in which demands drain their psychological or physical resources, leading to stress and related emotional challenges, which in turn increases turnover intentions. For example, Hu et al. (2011) found that job demands lead to negative organisational outcomes (including turnover intention) via burnout. The concept of emotional intelligence is primarily based on Goleman's model (1995), which posits that emotional intelligence consists of self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation. Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress (1984) provided the theoretical basis for understanding stress as a dynamic process involving appraisal of stressors and coping strategies and Mobley’s turnover model (1977) and subsequent research on organizational behavior such as that done by Steel and Ovalle, (1984) guided the conceptualization of turnover intentions as an individual’s predisposition to leave their current job.

The framework of this research suggests that there is a relationship between the level of emotional intelligence experienced by nurses and their level of stress. It is hypothesized that nurses with higher emotional intelligence will have lower levels of stress Ebstein et al. (2019) which will subsequently result in lower levels of turnover intentions and vice versa. Studies conducted by Burki et al. (2020) revealed a strong and direct significant relationship between job stress and employee turnover intentions. Specifically, an increase in job stress was found to be associated with an increase in employees' intentions to leave the organization, and vice versa. All the above findings give a firm theoretical ground on which the interplay between the variables of this study interact to lay a strong conceptual foundation. This, therefore, leads to the hypothetical assumptions as developed below.

Emotional Intelligence and Stress

Researchers such as Rakhshani et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant inverse relationship between nurses' emotional intelligence and their workplace. Their findings revealed that higher emotional intelligence among nurses was associated with lower levels of workplace. Specifically, nurses with high emotional intelligence exhibited self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. These attributes enabled these nurses to better control and manage stress in challenging situations through logical and rational analysis,

tolerance, and adaptation to stress, drawing on past experiences, and maintaining hope for improvement. Research conducted by Pazhouhan (2016) reveal that nurses experience high levels of stress, particularly in areas related to expectations, control, management support, and colleague support, with role-related stress also above average.

Counteractively, Rezvani and Khosravi (2019) revealed that emotional intelligence was negatively associated with stress which implies that emotionally intelligent software developers are more likely to manage the negative influence of stress and are more likely to trust in other team members which result in increased performance. A study conducted by Jung et al. (2019) revealed a negative correlation between stress and several aspects of emotional intelligence, including emotional awareness and expression, emotional thinking, and emotional regulation.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress.

Stress and Turnover Intentions

Evidence from Past research has consistently demonstrated a positive link between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions among nurses. A study by Han et al. (2015) investigated the effects of role stress, specifically role conflict and role ambiguity, on nurses' turnover intentions. Research conducted by An et al. (2022) revealed that a significant proportion of new nurses, who had just completed their eight-week central and departmental training, exhibited turnover intentions. Workplace and sleep disturbance were identified as critical factors contributing to these intentions. Despite the average scores for workplace and sleep disturbance not being very high, higher levels of these factors still increased the likelihood of turnover intention.

According to Cheraghi et al. (2025), emotional intelligence comprises skills that nurses develop within their professional environments, which subsequently facilitate the improvement of job performance. In a study by Al-Mansour (2021), it was discovered that stress levels among healthcare professionals in Saudi Arabia's primary healthcare facilities were positively correlated with their intention to leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Burki et al. (2020) investigated the impact of workplace on turnover intentions while considering the moderating role of emotional intelligence which revealed a strong and direct significant relationship between workplace and employee turnover intentions.

Earlier studies also found a significant positive effect of occupational stress on Chinese hotel employees' turnover intentions (Fong & Mahfar, 2013; Huang et al., 2018; Manoppo, 2020). This suggests that higher levels of work stress are associated with increased intentions to leave the organization. In their study conducted among the pesticide sector in Pakistan, Zahra et al. (2018) revealed a significant and positive relationship between workplace stressors and employees' intention to leave their organization. Therefore, these results provided a clear indication that higher levels of occupational stress are significantly associated with an increased intention to leave the organization.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between stress and turnover intentions.

Emotional Intelligence and Turnover Intentions

Earlier studies have revealed mixed findings on the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. A case in point is the research conducted by Hong and Lee (2016) which indicated that emotional intelligence had significant indirect and total effects on turnover intention through workplace, although it did not directly affect turnover intention. Furthermore, a study conducted by Trivellas et al. (2013) indicated that emotional intelligence significantly impacts nurses' turnover intentions. However, on the four components of emotional intelligence, only Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA) and Use of Emotion (UOE) showed direct associations with turnover intentions. Specifically, SEA and UOE were found to negatively influence turnover intentions.

Additionally, findings from earlier research suggest that emotionally intelligent nurses are better equipped to recognize, manage, and use their emotions to overcome obstacles, develop their skills and qualifications, and

advance their careers more effectively than others (Mohammad et al., 2014; Trivellas et al., 2013). This means that they can control stress in highly complex and demanding work environments, which helps prevent negative impacts on their career paths and reduces their intention to leave. Results from other studies conducted somehow recently also indicated statistically significant correlations between turnover intentions and emotional intelligence (Majeed & Jamshed, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). The results of this study showed that the higher the level of emotional intelligence that nurses possess, the better they performed. Hospital nurses often face stressful work environments due to high demands for nursing care. Individual emotional intelligence can enhance the resilience of nurses under stress, leading to better performance, higher job satisfaction, and ultimately a decrease in turnover intentions.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions.

The moderating role of stress between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions

Research has investigated the moderating role of stress in the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage stress and therefore exhibit lower turnover intentions compared to those with lower emotional intelligence. A study by Kim, Lee, and Chun (2019) revealed that workplace moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions, indicating that the negative relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions weakened under high levels of workplace.

Similarly, Alola and Idowu (2020) reported that workplace significantly influenced the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. Specifically, while emotional intelligence generally predicted lower turnover intentions, this negative relationship weakened under conditions of high occupational stress. In other words, as occupational stress increased, the protective effect of high emotional intelligence on turnover intentions diminished.

More recent research has indicated that workplace significantly moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions, with the negative relationship being stronger under low workplace conditions (Dwiputra, & Astika, 2019; Lu and Lin (2019).

H_{04}: Workplace does not significantly moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions.

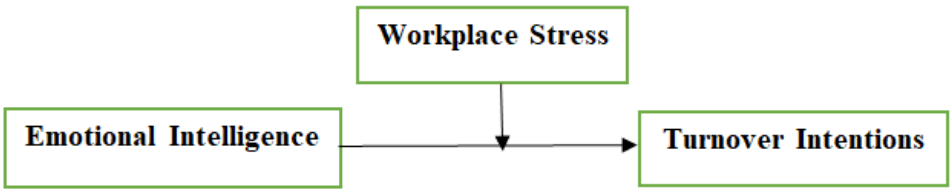

Fig. 1. The conceptual framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

Design and Sample

This study employed a cross-sectional design with quantitative approach of data collection using a correlational survey. A cross-sectional design for this research involved collecting data on variables from each participant in the stated sample and calculating a correlation coefficient to determine the strength and direction of the relationships as justified by Suleman et al., (2021). A sample of 123 nurses was selected from a population of 329 nurses at Mulago National Referral Hospital using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970). The gender distribution in the sample consisted of 87% female nurses and 13% male nurses. A simple random technique was used to arrive at the respondents in each stratum based on availability and willingness to take part in the research.

Instruments and Measures

A standard self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale was used after being approved by the supervisor.

Emotional Intelligence: To gauge emotional intelligence, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) by (LaPalme et al., 2016) was used. This self-report measure was designed to evaluate an individual's emotional intelligence and comprises a set of 16 items. Nurses responded to statements such as "I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time," "I have a good understanding of my own emotions," and "I really understand what I feel." Their responses were recorded using a five-point agree-disagree response format.

Workplace Stress: This study evaluated this variable using a 34-item scale specifically designed to gauge the frequency and significant sources of stress encountered by nurses working in hospital units. This scale was adapted from the work of Gray-Toft and Anderson (1981). Nurses provided responses to statements such as "I feel that my patients are too dependent on me" and "I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my work as a nurse." Their responses were recorded on a five-point agree-disagree response format.

Turnover Intentions: In the fourth section of the study, turnover intentions among nurses were examined. Turnover intent was assessed using a 6-item scale derived from the work of Walsh, Ashford, and Hill (1985). Nurses responded to statements such as "I often think about quitting this job" and "I am seriously considering leaving this job" using a five-point agree-disagree response format.

Demographic variables: The study was dominated by female nurses, with women making up 87% of the staff compared to 13% male, reflecting the broader trend of nursing as a female-dominated profession. The largest age group among the nurses is between 30 and 34 years, accounting for 30.1% of the workforce, suggesting a young and adaptable staff suited to the high demands of the hospital. Additionally, 67.5% of the nurses are married, and a significant portion (52%) holds a Diploma, reflecting a relatively well-qualified team. However, the majority (54.1%) have been employed for less than five years, indicating a relatively new workforce, which may have implications for training needs.

Reliability and validity: The reliability coefficients (α) for the scales were as follows: job .74 for the Emotional Intelligence scale, .83 for the Stress scale, and .81 for the Turnover Intentions scale. The discriminant and convergent validity of the subscales were confirmed through a confirmatory factor analysis. All values scales exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability for instrument development research. These findings suggest that the scales possess high internal consistency, affirming their reliability in assessing participants' emotional intelligence, stress, and turnover intentions, and thereby supporting their use in this study.

Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 as a statistical method used in this study. Total scores for each variable were calculated and used to conduct descriptive statistics, while Pearson correlations were employed for hypothesis testing. To examine the hypothesis regarding moderation, the PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Hayes (2022) was utilized, specifically using Model 1. The assumptions were that: there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress (Ho_1), there was no significant relationship between stress and turnover intentions (Ho_2), there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions (Ho_3), and stress does not significantly moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions (Ho_4).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

To provide a summary of the collected data, means and standard deviations (SDs) were calculated, as presented in Table 1 below.

Correlation Results

Results in Table 1 indicate that emotional intelligence and stress are not significantly related (r= -.01, p > .05). The near-zero correlation supports the conclusion that emotional intelligence and stress are independent of each other in some context thereby supporting H_{01}. On the other hand, Correlation results indicated significant and positive relationship between stress and turnover intentions (r= .30, p < .01). These findings suggest that as the level of stress experienced by nurse's increases, their intention to leave the job (turnover intention) also tends to increase, thereby not supporting H_{02}. Resembling the results in H_{01}, emotional intelligence and turnover intentions are not significantly related (r= -.08, p > .05), thereby supporting H_{03}. For this study, the word "overall" has been used to mean all items in the subscales inclusive in the analysis as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results of the Pearson Correlation Analysis

SN	Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Overall Emotional Intelligence	66.83	8.59	1									
2	Self-emotion appraisal	17.20	2.30	.71**	1								
3	Others' emotion appraisal	15.90	4.51	.76**	.25**	1							
4	Use of emotion	17.27	2.58	.75**	.66**	.31**	1						
5	Regulation of emotion	16.41	2.51	.66**	.44**	.28**	.46**	1					
6	Overall Stress	95.03	14.60	-.01	.14	-.08	.04	-.13	1				
7	Stressors inherent	22.10	4.02	.27**	.16	.15	.29**	.18*	.57**	1			
8	Stressors associated with the nurse-patient relationship	16.50	4.44	-.28**	-.11	-.19*	-.24**	-.31**	.62**	.21*	1		
9	Stressors associated with the work environment	55.46	10.40	-.01	.17	-.10	.05	-.12	.91**	.32**	.35**	1	
10	Overall Turnover Intentions	13.76	4.60	-.08	-.11	-.06	-.04	-.02	.30**	.18	.11	.31**	1

Note. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$, 2-tailed.

Regression Analysis for Mediation

The moderation effect of workplace on the relationship between emotional intelligence and Turnover Intentions was analysed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022), specifically through Model 1 and results are indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis for Moderation

Predictor	β	SE	t	95.0% CI		R^2	df1	df2	p
				LL	UL				
Constant	80.12	30.60	189.17	19.51	140.74	.37	3.00	114.00	.00
Emotional Intelligence,	.11	.06	2.04	-1.98	-.22				.04
Workplace Stress	.23	.05	4.86	-1.34	-.05				.00
Interaction term	.01	.00	2.43	.00	.02				.02

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; df = degree of freedom

The regression results indicated in Table 2 above reveal that the R-Square value is .37 which means that emotional intelligence explains 37% of the variance in turnover intentions. This shows that emotional intelligence has a fairly moderate effect on predicting turnover intentions. In other words, while emotional intelligence contributes to explaining why employees might consider leaving their jobs, the majority of the variation in turnover intentions (63%) is influenced by other factors that are not accounted for by emotional intelligence alone in the moderation model.

However, the interaction term in Table 2 indicates a statistically significant moderation effect of workplace on the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions, indicated by a positive interaction term, without a zero in the 95% confidence interval with $p < .05$; workplace effect (β =.01, *SE* =.00, t = 2.43, 95% CI: .00, .02, p <.05) . This suggests that stress indeed plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. In other words, the effect of emotional intelligence on turnover intentions is influenced by the level of stress experienced by nurses. Specifically, this indicates that as stress levels change, the strength and possibly the direction of the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions also change as indicated in Fig. 2. This finding supports the hypothesis that stress can intensify or mitigate the impact of emotional intelligence on the nurse's intention to leave an organization.

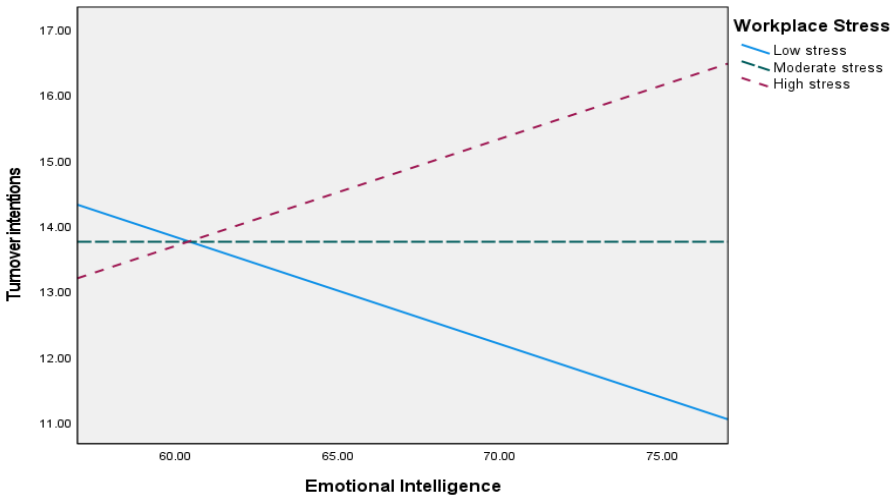

Fig. 2. Interactive effects of workplace and emotional intelligence on turnover intentions.

DISCUSSION

The findings in Table 1 above indicate that overall emotional intelligence and stress are not significantly related. This means that emotional intelligence may not influence the level of stress experienced by nurses in this study. In other words, in some instances, whether a nurse has high or low emotional intelligence, it does not appear to affect their stress levels. This is in line with findings from other researchers that emotional intelligence and stress are not significantly related (Miri et al., 2013; Gohm et al., 2005). On the other hand, the findings indicated that emotional intelligence was significantly related to the stress component of stressors inherent in the nursing role, meaning that as emotional intelligence levels increase, so does the experience of these stressors. The positive relationship may occur because nurses with higher emotional intelligence are more aware of their own and others' emotions.

Additionally, the results indicate a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress component of stressors associated with the nurse-patient relationship. This means that as emotional intelligence levels increase, nurses experience less stress related to interactions with patients. Higher emotional intelligence likely enhances nurses' ability to manage emotions effectively and build rapport with patients, reducing the stress that typically arises from challenging nurse-patient interactions.

The findings in Table 1 above that emotional intelligence was significantly related to stress component of stressors inherent in the nursing role and findings of a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress component of stressors associated with the nurse-patient relationship are consistent with

the results of Rakhshani et al. (2018), Karimi et al. (2014), Lawal and Idemudia (2017), Ayranci et al. (2012), Pazhouhan (2016), Rezvani and Khosravi (2019), Suleman et al. (2021), Ebstein et al. (2019), Jung et al. (2019), Yamani et al. (2014), and Rahim (2010). These findings imply that emotional intelligence could play a dual role in both heightening awareness and enhancing coping mechanisms to handle role-specific stressors, while also mitigating stress associated with patient interactions. However, the findings that emotional intelligence and stress are not significantly related are not in line with the findings of Rakhshani et al. (2018), Karimi et al. (2014), Lawal and Idemudia (2017), Ayranci et al. (2012), Pazhouhan (2016), Rezvani and Khosravi (2019), Suleman et al. (2021), Ebstein et al. (2019), Jung et al. (2019), Yamani et al. (2014), and Rahim (2010) who reported that emotional intelligence and stress are significantly related.

The findings indicate a significant, positive relationship between stress and turnover intentions, as shown in Table 1 above. This means that higher stress levels among nurses are associated with a greater intention to leave, while lower stress levels are associated with a lower intention to leave. The strong positive correlation shows that stress significantly influences nurses' desire to leave, emphasizing the importance of implementing effective stress management strategies to reduce turnover intentions.

On the other hand, findings indicated that the stress component of stressors associated with the nurse-patient relationship was not significantly related to turnover intentions. This suggests that stress from nurse-patient interactions does not significantly affect nurses' intentions to leave their jobs, implying that other factors may have a greater influence on turnover intentions among nurses at Mulago National Referral Hospital. The findings indicating a significant positive relationship between stress and turnover intentions align with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This Model explains that high job demands, such as heavy workloads, time pressure, and emotional strain, can increase stress and turnover intentions. However, having job resources such as support from colleagues, opportunities for growth, and decision-making autonomy can reduce stress and lower turnover intentions. When job demands are high and resources are insufficient, stress and turnover intentions increase. But with adequate resources, stress decreases, leading to better work outcomes and reduced turnover intentions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The findings that there is a significant and positive relationship between stress and turnover intentions aligns with the findings of An et al. (2022), Han et al. (2015), Yim et al. (2017), Al-Mansour's (2021), Burki et al. (2020), Huang et al. (2018), Manoppo (2020), Fong and Mahfar (2013), Salahudin et al. (2007), Zahra et al. (2018), Rainayee (2013), Giao et al. (2020), and Rainayee (2013) who also reported a significant correlation between stress and turnover intentions. Stress is significantly related to turnover intentions because high stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and a sense of low achievement, pushing nurses to consider leaving their jobs. As job demands grow and coping becomes harder, leaving the job or the nursing profession may seem more attractive. This positive link shows that as stress increases, so does the chance of nurses wanting to leave. Mulago National Referral Hospital could reduce turnover by promoting stress management and creating a supportive work environment to keep skilled nurses.

The findings that the stress component of stressors associated with the nurse-patient relationship were not significantly related to turnover intentions align with the findings of Tziner et al. (2015) who reported a lack of significant direct linkage between turnover intentions and stress. Turnover intentions are not significantly related to stress in this context because, while nurse-patient relationship stressors may be challenging, they may not be as impactful on a nurse's overall career decisions as other stressors, such as workload, routine tasks, or lack of support. This indicates that interpersonal stressors related to patient interactions may not directly influence a nurse's desire to leave their position; instead, these stressors might be more manageable or perceived as part of the role itself. Therefore, turnover intentions may be more strongly influenced by the stress component of stressors inherent in the nursing role and stress component of stressors associated with the work environment that affect the nurse's ability to perform effectively and find fulfillment in their work. This suggests that interventions aimed at reducing turnover intentions may need to target broader organizational stressors rather than focusing solely on interpersonal aspects of the nurse-patient relationship. However, the findings that there is a significant and positive relationship between stress and turnover intentions do not align with the findings of Tziner et al. (2015), who reported a lack of significant direct linkage between turnover intentions and stress.

The findings, as presented in Table 1, indicate that emotional intelligence and turnover intentions are not significantly related. This put forwards the argument that emotional intelligence may not significantly affect the way nurses consider leaving their jobs. In other words, a nurse's level of emotional intelligence seems not to influence their intention to stay or leave. The findings of this research are in line with those of Ouerdian et al. (2021), who reported no evidence of a direct relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. In contrast, the findings of this research are not in line with those of Hong and Lee (2016), Trivellas et al. (2013), Wang et al. (2023), Majeed and Jamshed (2021), Wang et al. (2022), Trivellas et al. (2011), Giao et al. (2020), Shukla and Srivastava (2016), Akhtar et al. (2017a), Akhtar et al. (2017b), and Mohammad et al. (2014), who reported a relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. This discrepancy may be due to contextual differences, as nurses Uganda might experience unique workplace conditions or stressors that influence turnover intentions more directly, such as organizational factors such work overload, higher job demands, coupled with resource limitations. These external factors could play a more significant role in shaping nurses' decisions to stay or leave, diminishing the impact of emotional intelligence on their turnover intentions. Furthermore, cultural and systemic variations in the healthcare environment may affect how emotional intelligence interacts with turnover intentions.

Finally, this research found support for our hypothesis that stress significantly moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. In other words, the effect of emotional intelligence on turnover intentions depends on the stress levels experienced by nurses as indicated in Fig.2. As stress levels change, the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions can also shift. This finding supports the idea that stress can either increase or reduce the impact of emotional intelligence on a nurse's intention to leave the organization. The findings of my research are in line with those of Kim, Lee, and Chun (2019), Alola and Idowu (2020), and Lu and Lin (2019), who reported that stress plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. Stress moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions because, in high-stress situations, even individuals with high emotional intelligence may experience increased turnover intentions due to the overwhelming demands and pressures of the job. Emotional intelligence may help individuals manage stress up to a certain level, but beyond that threshold, the protective effects may diminish, leading to higher turnover intentions. In contrast, under lower stress conditions, emotional intelligence might more effectively buffer against turnover intentions by enhancing coping strategies and resilience. This suggests that the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions is influenced by the level of stress nurses experience, with higher stress potentially weakening the positive effects of emotional intelligence on turnover intentions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that emotional intelligence is a significant negative predictor of turnover intentions among Ugandan nurses, meaning that nurses with higher levels of emotional intelligence are less likely to consider leaving their jobs. Stress amplified the relationship between low emotional intelligence and high turnover intentions, indicating that emotionally less intelligent nurses are particularly vulnerable to stress-induced turnover. Furthermore, workplace stress moderates this relationship, such that under conditions of high stress, the protective effect of emotional intelligence on turnover intentions weakens. The findings suggest that while emotional intelligence helps nurses manage emotional demands and reduce their desire to leave, excessive workplace stress can diminish these benefits. Overall, enhancing emotional intelligence through training and implementing strategies to reduce workplace stress could jointly lower turnover intentions and improve nurse retention in Ugandan healthcare settings. This research highly recommends people managers to prioritize stress management and emotional intelligence training as key components of staff retention strategies. By institutionalizing emotional intelligence and stress management training into policy frameworks for nursing staff development, hospitals can proactively address some of the factors contributing to turnover. Policies that mandate regular stress assessments, promote psychological safety, and provide access to mental health resources could help mitigate the impact of stress on turnover intentions. Furthermore, integrating these policies into nursing performance evaluations and professional development plans can foster a culture that values emotional well-being and retention.

Theoretical Contribution

This study adds to advanced organisational behaviour theories, particularly the Job Demands–Resources model that informed it. The research results support the notion that integrating personal resources, termed emotional intelligence, and situational strain, termed stress, can explain turnover intentions in an organization as indicated in Fig. 1. By modelling stress as a moderator of the emotional intelligence and turnover-intention relationship, the research provides nuanced insight into the boundary conditions under which emotional intelligence reduces employees' turnover intentions. Moreover, applying the model in a resource-constrained, Sub-Saharan African healthcare context extends the generalisability of existing theories and contributes to theory grounded in healthcare settings.

Practical Implications

The study highlights that developing and supporting emotional intelligence among employees, such as nurses, can be an effective strategy to reduce turnover intentions and improve their retention. Organizational administrators should therefore integrate emotional intelligence training into professional development programs to help employees manage emotional demands, improve teamwork, and cope more effectively with job-related challenges.

Limitations

This study focuses solely on nurses working in Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala, Uganda. Therefore, future research should include other categories of employees to identify possible differences and enhance cross-cultural contrasts by examining more specific perspectives. Additionally, this was a cross-sectional study; hence, a longitudinal study is recommended to investigate how various organizational factors, such as leadership styles, team dynamics, and available resources, interact with emotional intelligence and stress to influence turnover intentions. Research could also explore the impact of emotional intelligence and stress on job performance, patient outcomes, and job satisfaction to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their role in the nursing profession.

Declarations

Funding

This research did not receive any funding support from any organization.

Research Clearance

This study was cleared by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Humanities and Social Science, Makerere University – Kampala, Uganda, and its protocol number is MAKSSREC 06.24.754.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this paper.

Data Availability

The data for this study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon a written permission.

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