

# The Role of Human Resource Management Practices and Work-Life Balance on Employee Retention in Public Healthcare Sector of Pakistan

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## Abstract

**Background:** Employee retention is a process of addressing a shortage of rehabilitated employees which is challenging everywhere throughout the world. Similarly, Pakistan is no exception from retention issues in public sector hospitals. This is happening due to poor retention policies and less spending 0.90 percent of GDP making it more difficult to retain health doctors. This research aims to explore the relationships between human resource management (HRM) practices (career advancement opportunities and compensation), work-life balance and employee's retention in the public healthcare sector of Pakistan.

**Materials and Methods:** A structured questionnaire consisting of 257 medical doctors working in different public sector hospitals in Punjab, Pakistan, was used for data collection. This research was cross-sectional in nature and used quantitative research techniques. The smart PLS was used to test the hypothesized relationships of the study.

**Results:** The results of the study showed that the use of HRM practices (career advancement opportunities and compensation), work-life balance have a statistically significant effect on employee retention. The findings of this research advance current literature to non-Western countries, such as Pakistan by providing literature on doctors' retention.

**Conclusion:** The empirical results of this study suggest that HRM practices (career advancement opportunities and compensation) and work-life balance can increase doctor's retention in the healthcare sector of Pakistan. The theoretical and practical contributions of this research and the limitations and recommendations for future research are also discussed on the basis of the findings.

**Keywords:** HRM practices, Work-life balance, Employee retention, Healthcare sector, Pakistan.

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## I. Introduction

In today's world, most organizations face challenges in retaining their potential employees, because most organizations have grown rapidly and the competition between these organizations is high in order to sustain their businesses [1-3]. According to Aruna and Anitha [4] it is completely agreeable that organization's long-term success is totally dependent in managing and retaining talented employees. Moreover, a survey conducted by Maurer [5] on employee retention revealed that organizations across the world are facing serious issues related to employee retention. In addition, Globeforce Employee's Recognition Report [6] has acknowledged that employee retention is an important problem faced by many organizations. According to this report, 47 percent of HR professionals said that their organizations are facing issues related to employee retention.

Moreover, retention of employees is also an area of constant focus for healthcare sector as this sector can realize the importance in terms of healthcare cost, quality and continuity of care, stress, and burnout of the remaining healthcare employee [7, 8]. Additionally, health sector is also facing severe retention issues [9, 10]. As stated by Almaaitah, Harada [10] Jordanian Health Ministry is facing doctors and nurse's retention issues in public sector hospitals and their estimated shortage of medical staff ranges from 30 percent to 40 percent. According to Liu, Goryakin [11] it has been estimated that by 2030 there will be a shortage of 3.2 million health professionals which include doctors and nurses in both low and middle-income countries (for example, India, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Bangladesh and Pakistan). This demand stems from low investments in human capital and not being able to attract and retain health professionals in places with dire needs [10]. Furthermore, doctor's retention in Uganda and Mozambique is one of the main problems in the success of WHO health programs [12]. Moreover, in Thailand and Kenya, retention was appeared to be an important challenge due to healthcare

doctor's shortage and rapid growth in the healthcare industry which is adding to the problem of doctor's retention [13, 14].

Similarly, Pakistan is no exception from retention issues in public sector hospitals [15]. This is happening due to poor retention policies implemented by the government, increasing population, organizational transformation, an imbalance between supply and demand, change of profession and less spending 0.5 to 0.9 percent of GDP in the healthcare sector for the last ten years which is far less than WHO benchmark of 6 percent of GDP making it more difficult for doctors to stay in the public healthcare sector of Pakistan [16-20]. It is extremely painful to say that Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world where health policy has received very little attention from policy makers since its inception in 1947 [21-23]. The picture of health services in the third world countries, for example, Yemen, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan is quite gloomy and need enormous efforts and consideration when compared to the most developed countries, for example, USA, Australia, UK and Canada [23]. This attitude of policymakers has made the doctors in Pakistan to move abroad for better incentives and career structure and government is unable to retain them [24]. These factors are adding to the problem of doctor's shortage in the public healthcare sector of Pakistan [24]. Hence, the present study proposed to investigate HRM practices (compensation and career advancement opportunities) and work-life balance that may influence doctor's retention in the public healthcare sector of Pakistan.

### **Employee Retention**

Employee retention is defined as employees wish to stay with their current organization based on the factors that have been offered by the organization [25]. According to Cascio [26] employee retention is perceived as the initiatives taken by the management to keep employees safe from leaving, providing them incentives for their efforts in order to perform their jobs effectively, ensuring harmonious working relations between employees and supervisors, providing them career opportunities for their professional growth. Different researchers have defined retention in different ways. According to Pittino, Visintin [27] employees stay with the organization when there is an environment of motivation and encouragement and the rewards they receive have a great importance to satisfy their aspirations and needs.

Furthermore, most of employees feel that they have more worth than what they are actually being paid. There is a natural difference between what employee think they should be paid and what the organizations spend in compensation. When the disparity becomes greater and another opportunity occurs, it will lead to less intention to stay [28]. Retention of employees will only be increased if employees feel that they are being treated equally by the organization, have career advancement opportunities and have a good working environment that makes them happy to stay longer. To conclude, following Kyndt, Dochy [29] and within the context of this research, this study conceptualized doctor's retention as doctors' desires and efforts to work and stay within the same hospital in order to achieve personal and hospital objectives.

## **II. Hypothesis Development**

### **Career Advancement Opportunities**

Weng and Youmin [30] defined career advancement opportunities as employee's perceptions to maintain their career needs by developing career advancement opportunities provided by the organization which increase their productivity and performance and preparing them for this ever-changing world. The study has shown that, employees perceptions of the provision of opportunities for their career growth and putting this into practice influence employee retention [12]. A research on service sector (such as, education and banking) found that unmet career prospects and limited career choices were the main reasons of employees intention to leave the organization [31]. In addition, the absence of career opportunities is the main cause of low retention. Somewhat surprisingly, limited studies have been done in the healthcare sector to understand the relationship of career advancement opportunities with employee retention. Hence, career advancement opportunities are highly needed by the healthcare sector of Pakistan to improve employee retention. Thus, the researcher hypothesizes the following:

**H1:** Career advancement opportunities have a positive and significant influence on employee retention.

### **Compensation**

Snell and Bohlander [32] defined compensation as "all forms of pay and rewards received by employees for the performance of their jobs". According to Cave, Chung [33] a positive relationship exists between compensation and employee retention which shows that more employees are being rewarded, the more they likely to stay with their organizations. This is supported by Adzei and Atinga [34] where financial incentives is being found as the most significant factor in influencing employees motivation and employee retention. According to Perkins and Scutella [35] international evidence indicates that a well-designed financial incentives and benefits perceived by employees can play an important role in supporting employee retention. That is why it is important for an employer to understand the preferences and factors of motivation of

employees in order to attract and retain them. Other aspects that need to be focused are the challenges in determining the right compensation system and the amount and type of benefits received by the employees [36]. Scholars have traditionally focused on non-monetary rewards, whereas recently both practitioners and scholars have highlighted and recommended the added value of focusing in economic factors such as the role of compensation (monetary rewards) in influencing employee's retention in the context of Pakistan. Thus, the researcher hypothesizes the following:

**H2:** Compensation has a positive and significant influence on employee retention.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance mean to keep up a good balance between employee's job and family life. According to Chalofsky [37] a balance between job and family life is attained by adjusting work and leisure time through an environment that is supportive and provides flexible work schedules to employees. According to Kumar and Chakraborty (2013) work-life balance is a kind of equilibrium or cycle that can lead to employee contentment, which may lead to increased levels of work performance, productivity and retention level [15, 16]. However, work-life balance negative imbalance outcomes are related to lower employee commitment, stress, domestic violence, job dissatisfaction, low productivity and employee turnover [38]. Moreover, employees perceive that the strategies incorporated in offering a balance between employees jobs and family life help them in building trust and retaining potential employees within an employer-employee relationship [1]. In addition, previous studies have shown a direct relationship between work-life balance, employees positive attitudes, behavioural outcomes such as employee retention [39]. Somewhat surprisingly, limited studies have been devoted to understanding the relationship of work-life balance with employee' retention in the healthcare sector of Pakistan. Thus, the researcher hypothesizes the following:

**H3:** Work life balance has a positive and significant influence on employee retention.

## **III. Research Methodology**

The suggested hypotheses were tested using a quantitative approach. This method helps the theoretical model and its variables to be statistically verified. A survey method that is commonly used and most widely accepted in social science studies was followed [40]. A cross-sectional research method was used to find out respondent's perceptions. The unit of analysis for this research were doctors working in the public health sector of Punjab, Pakistan. The data were analyzed by using SPSS 23.0 for descriptive statistics and smart PLS 3.0 was used for the hypothesized relationships. A total of 271 questionnaires were received out of 400 questionnaires with a response rate of 67.75 percent. A total of 257 questionnaires were used for the final analysis after detection of outliers and incomplete questionnaires. The respondent's data shows that there were 53.7 percent male and remaining 46.3 percent were females. 72.8 percent of the respondents were married, and 27.2 percent were unmarried. As the study was related to doctors from the health care sector of Pakistan so the highest number of doctors nearly 49.8 percent were qualified at MBBS level. These employees are working as a house officer in the hospitals with a percentage of 20.2. Employees are working at different medical specialty like, Gynecology, Medicine, Pathology, Surgery and Allied, Dermatology, Ophthalmology, Radiology, Orthopedic, Psychiatry, Cardiology, Pulmonology, Dentistry and many more. So according to these specializations the highest number of doctors are related to gynecology filed with 17.1 percent. Moreover, lot of doctors have work experience between 1-3 years, which represents 26.5 percent.

### **Measurement Scales**

In this study, employee retention was measured by eleven (11) items scale adapted from Kyndt, Dochy [29]. Career advancement opportunities scale was adapted from Delery and Doty [41] which contain four (4) items. Compensation scale was adapted from Delery and Doty [41] which contain six (6) items. In this research, work-life balance scale was adopted from Langford [42] which contain four items. These items of the variables have been measured using a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

## **IV. Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling Approach**

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) has attracted much attention for different scholars in different fields of business research [43]. In PLS-SEM path model, the measurement model or outer model described the relationship between latent constructs and their respective items. A measurement model assessment involves examining individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity and VIF [44]. Moreover, the structural model generally involves the steps of coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect Size of coefficient of determination ( $f^2$ ) and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of the model. All these steps of the measurement model and structural model are followed and interrupted below.

**Individual Items Reliability**

Indicator reliability or individual item reliability is assessed by investigating the outer loadings of every item of the constructs [45]. The common approach is to preserve items with loadings of >0.70 [44]. In this study the reliability score value of each latent construct items reached the satisfactory level.

**Internal Consistency Reliability**

According to Sun, Chou [46], internal consistency denotes to the level to which, all the items in particular scale/subscales are measuring the same concept. According to Nunnally and Bernstein [47] the composite reliability score of 0.70 or above is considered acceptable. Table 1 has shown that the composite reliability value of each latent construct reaches satisfactory level.

**Convergent Validity**

Convergent validity refers to the individual items are correlated with each other to measure the same construct [48]. Our study has measured the convergent validity of the latent constructs through Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Chin [49] has recommended that the AVE value should be 0.50 or above to ensure sufficient convergent validity.

**Collinearity Statistics (VIF)**

Keeping the recommendations of Sarstedt, Hair [50], the current study has reported VIF reaching the satisfactory level of > 3 and < 5 [43, 51]. Table 1 has presented the results of the measurement model.

**Table no 1: Constructs Validity and Reliability**

Constructs	Indicators	Loadings	CR	AVE	VIF
Career Advancement Opportunities	CAO1	0.874	0.894	0.680	2.299
	CAO2	0.836			2.023
	CAO3	0.805			1.680
	CAO4	0.780			1.707
Compensation	Comp1	0.804	0.882	0.556	1.938
	Comp2	0.771			1.767
	Comp3	0.763			1.641
	Comp4	0.751			1.640
	Comp5	0.610			1.338
	Comp6	0.758			1.727
Work Life Balance	WLB1	0.876	0.910	0.718	2.515
	WLB2	0.798			1.900
	WLB3	0.740			2.030
	WLB4	0.884			2.341
Employee Retention	ER1	0.747	0.892	0.511	1.796
	ER2	0.814			2.292
	ER3	0.749			1.807
	ER4	0.759			1.877
	ER5	0.548			1.267
	ER6	0.554			1.348
	ER9	0.751			1.902
	ER10	0.751			1.936

**Discriminant Validity**

Discriminant validity is defined as, “the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards” [48]. Heterotrait-

Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criterion was used in the current study to assess the discriminant validity, proposed by Henseler, Ringle [52]. The HTMT suggested threshold value is 0.90 [53].

**Table no 2: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)**

Constructs	CAO	Comp	ER	WLB
CAO				
Comp	0.613			
ER	0.603	0.555		
WLB	0.638	0.571	0.673	

**Assessing the Significance of Structural (Inner) Path Model**

After evaluating the measurement model, the current study evaluated the significance of structural (inner) path model. In order to get path coefficient, standard error and t-values, the current study used standard bootstrapping procedure with 5000 bootstrapping subsamples as per the guiding principles of [48]. The current study revealed three relationships with the dependent variable. The relationships have depicted the coefficients of three hypotheses and their respective t- values for making decision whether the hypothesized relationships are statistically significant or not.

**Table no 3:** Results of the Structural Model

Path Coefficient	beta value	SD	t values	p values	Decision
Career Advancement Opportunities -> Employee Retention	0.216	0.059	3.633	0.000	Accepted
Compensation -> Employee Retention	0.179	0.066	2.711	0.003	Accepted
Work Life Balance -> Employee Retention	0.379	0.066	5.737	0.000	Accepted

With respect to Hypothesis H1, the findings have indicated that the relationship between career advancement opportunities (CAO) and employee retention (ER) was significant ( $\beta=0.216$ ,  $t=3.633$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Therefore, supported hypothesis H1. Moreover, the findings reported that compensation and employee retention was also significant ( $\beta=0.179$ ,  $t=2.711$ ,  $p<0.005$ ), thus hypothesis H2 was supported. Likewise, the results, as shown in Table 5 and Figure 2, indicated that the relationship between work life balance and employee retention was significant ( $\beta=0.379$ ,  $t=5.737$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Therefore, hypothesis H3 was also supported.

**Assessment of Variance Explained in the Endogenous Latent Variable**

The  $R^2$  value represents the percentage of total variance explained by the exogenous variables towards the endogenous variable [54]. Chin [49] provided the values for  $R^2$ , if 0.67 as substantial, 0.33 as moderate, and 0.19 as weak respectively while using PLS-SEM path modeling approach. Cross-validated redundancy measure can be utilized to evaluate the predictive quality of the model, signified as  $Q^2$ [48]. The value of cross validated redundancy approach should be more than zero, the study revealed that the cross-validation redundancy ( $Q^2$ ) of employee retention, thus, signifying the model’s predictive relevance in accordance with Henseler, Ringle [55]. In our study all the values are at satisfactory level.

**Table no 4:** R square ( $R^2$ ) and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )

Dependent Variable	$R^2$	$Q^2$
Employee Retention	0.418	0.196

**V. Discussion**

Pertaining to the test of career advancement opportunities and its relationship with employee retention, the PLS structural path modeling results have suggested a statistically significant relationship, thus supported hypothesis H1 of this study. The finding suggests that employees value the career advancement opportunities provided by their respective healthcare sectors. They also perceived that their hospitals must pay attention to their career growth and the facilitation of their lifelong careers. The results of the present study are similar to those of a previous study[56], where there is a direct relationship between career advancement opportunities and employee retention. In addition, this finding also supports the concept of reciprocity of the social exchange theory (SET). According to SET, employees who feel that their employer provides sufficient career advancement opportunities may not be reluctant to leave the organization and feel indebted to reciprocate in a positive way and stay longer [57-59].

The result of the current study showed a statistically significant relationship between compensation and employee retention, thus supporting hypothesis H2. The finding suggests that employees valued the compensation provided by their respective hospitals. Accordingly, they also viewed positively the focus of their hospitals on employee’s compensation packages. Collectively, this helped them to psychologically connect with work and stay longer with the organization. The finding of this study is also consistent with the previous study [60], which show that the relationship between compensation and employee’s retention was statistically significant. In the same way, the compensation positively predicted intention to stay. Employees perform work on the job with the understanding that the employer will reciprocate by providing compensation and other positive considerations consistent with the work of social exchange theory [61].

Pertaining to the test of work-life balance and its relationship with employee retention, PLS structural path modeling results have suggested a statistically significant relationship. Hypothesis H3 was therefore supported. The result of present study is consistent with previous studies [62] that work-life balance has a positive and significant relationship with employee retention. Thus, in the context of developing countries, it also proves that work-life balance is a good predictor of raising the level of employee retention. Employee perceptions of work-life balance strategies used by many health sector leaders will help them balance their work and family life and increase their retention levels. Similarly, SET provides an illustrative framework to define how employee’s work-life balance perceptions are associated with employee retention. It has been argued that employees who find a balance between work and family and receive socio-emotional or non-financial benefits from the organization feel indebted to respond in a positive way [63, 64].

**Implications of the Study**

With strong theoretical justifications and evidence, the study incorporated two HRM practices (career advancement opportunities, compensation) and work-life balance, which established and have established

significant results between the relationships. The current study has added value to existing literature by addressing the role of HRM practices on employee retention in the public health sector in Pakistan. Likewise, the study findings also questioned the assertions of the social exchange theory, which emphasizes on the exchange relationship between employee and employer for shaping attitudinal and behavioral outcomes amongst individuals. Another theoretical contribution of this study is that the results add further knowledge to the black-box stage between exogenous and endogenous latent constructs. Henceforth, by covering major lapses, particularly in the domain of HR, the inclusion of individual HRM practices has made the framework more theoretically robust and empirically scalable. Taken together, this study not only contributes to the pertinent literature on these variables and its relationships, but also gives the idea for future researchers to consider and address the issue of employee retention in a highly responsive manner.

On a practical view, the study results may have several practical implications, especially for the service sector with a particular focus on the public health sector in Pakistan. This study may contribute to a better understanding of health sector doctor's retention with practical aspect. The intention of the doctor to remain in the healthcare sector would help to mitigate the shortage of doctors, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills and provide quality care to patients. The findings of this study have practical implications and contributions for the health sector. Policy makers and practitioners may consider the results of this study while formulating or implementing the appropriate HRM practices and work-life balance in the healthcare sector in order to improve employee retention. Given the evidence from this study, human resource practitioners and policymakers in the healthcare sector need to pay attention to these issues in order to minimize their intention to leave the organization. Indeed, human resource practitioners are expected to play important role in the development of fair policies to attract skilled, competent and eligible employees without any political interference. Moreover, career paths for each position may be developed and designed in conjunction with detailed employee progress plans to visualize their development.

## **VI. Conclusions, Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

In conclusion, the study has provided empirical understanding pertaining to the direct influence of proposed exogenous and endogenous relationships in public health sector in Pakistan. The empirical evidence provided by this study supported the theoretical propositions of the study. First, the study findings depend solely on the public health sector. Consequently, it may be very difficult to generalize the findings of the current study to other service sector organizations. Future researchers would therefore conduct similar studies in other service sector organizations operating in Pakistan, such as insurance, hotels, banks and education, with a view to verifying the findings of the current study. Second, the current study was a cross-sectional study and data were collected at one point in time, with the result that only a short population was studied. Future researchers would therefore conduct a comparable but longitudinal study to analyze the constructs over a longer period for the receptive confirmation of the hypothesized relationship of the present study. Third, this study collected data using self-reported questionnaires which might create the common method bias problem in the study. Future studies may therefore consider other strategies, such as qualitative and mixed method research, where both qualitative and quantitative analyses should be carried out so that the level of retention of healthcare employees in Pakistan can be described from different perspectives. Lastly, this study considered only public health sector doctors working in Punjab, Pakistan. Further research may involve doctors from all four provinces of Pakistan in order to make the results more generalizable. It would also be better to study the health sector employee's retention and compare findings with private and not for profit organizations (NGOs) operating in Pakistan for a comprehensive understanding and the prospects for doctor's retention. On the other hand, since this study was conducted in a developing context like Pakistan, the findings of this study are expected to be implemented in other developing countries as a means of improving employee retention.

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