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INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE MORALE ON RETENTION IN PRIVATE HOSPITALS OF KERALA

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Abstract

Staff retention is one of the major issues faced in the Kerala niche of the private healthcare industry and especially because of the growing workforce mobility and migration of healthcare workers. This paper discusses the role of employee morale in retention of employees in Kerala private hospitals through conceptualization of employee morale as a multidimensional construct of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership support, recognition and rewards, work environment and career development. Quantitative cross-sectional research design was followed and 300 employees working in the selected hospitals (Ernakulam, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram district) in the healthcare profession were sampled to gather primary data. A five-point Likert scale structured questionnaire was used and the results analysed through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results have shown that the moderate level of morale and retention intention was reported by employees. The results of correlation showed that there were a significant number of positive correlations between all dimensions of morale and employee retention ($p < 0.01$) with the strongest associations between organizational commitment ($r = .72$), work environment ($r = .70$), and job satisfaction ($r = .68$). The results of a multiple regression analysis revealed that, employee morale is a significant predictor of retention with $R^2 = 0.66$. The strongest predictor was the organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.31$), then the job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.28$), and the work environment ($\beta = 0.27$), and the leadership support, recognition and rewards and career development were also statistically significant and had positive effects ($p < 0.05$). The findings substantiate the fact that psychological attachment, supportive management practices, and positive working conditions are essential predictors of retention in the workforce of the private hospitals. The researchers find that employee morale is a strategic necessity to increase workforce stability, turnover intention, and quality healthcare provision in the business of the Kerala healthcare sector.

Keywords: Employee Morale; Employee Retention; Job Satisfaction; Organizational Commitment; Leadership Support; Private Hospitals; Kerala Healthcare Sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of employee retention in healthcare is now becoming a strategic priority across the globe because workforce shortage remains a persistent problem and worker turnover is expensive. Healthcare industry is labour-intensive and the quality of service provided is directly related to competence of workforce, its stability and motivation. The World Health Organization (2020) notes that the overall nursing shortage is almost 5.9 million nurses, but low- and middle-income countries are the most impacted. The relatively high turnover rates in healthcare workers conflict with patient continuum, additional expense of recruitment and education, and organization efficiency (Hayes et al., 2012).

In India, the private healthcare sector is very dominant in-service delivery. According to the National Health Profile (CBHI, 2022), the number of private sectors, which contribute over 60% of hospital infrastructure and healthcare services, is quite high. With its high index of human development and status as a region with high health indicators, Kerala has many private hospitals that provide high tertiary and specialty care (Government of Kerala, 2023). In spite of its good healthcare image, Kerala has been experiencing a significant workforce migration, job dissatisfaction and employee turnover especially among the nurses as they are seeking foreign jobs (Percot, 2006; Nair and Healey, 2006).

Employee morale as the broad term that is defined by the common attitude, satisfaction rates, commitment, and psychological health of people working in an organization is a crucial factor that will define the retention results. Strong morale leads to organizational commitment and low turnover intention whereas low morale leads to burnout, absenteeism and job withdrawal behaviours (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982). This is further explained by Herzberg in his Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) where recognition, achievement, responsibility and work environment are found to play a significant role in employee motivation and satisfaction and as such the reason why they would want to stay in an organization.

Empirical research always shows high correlation between job satisfaction and retention of employees. In their literature review on turnover research, Hom et al. (2017) found job satisfaction and organizational commitment to be the main predictors of employee retention in all industrial sectors. Lu, Zhao, and While (2019) discovered in the healthcare setting that supportive leadership, proper staffing, equitable payment, and professional development prospects have a significant positive effect on nurse job contentment and turnover intention. On the same note, Aiken et al. (2012) indicated that the improved work environment and staffing ratios were related to the reduced level of burnout and improved retention of nurses within hospitals.

In the case of the Kerala private hospitals, there are a number of situational variables that affect the morale of the employees. In overseas markets, competitive remuneration system, high workload, lack of career advancements, and perceived injustice in managerial procedures are likely to lead to lower morale and high turnover intention (Nair and Webster, 2013). Also, there is a strong association between stress at work and emotional burnout and reduced organizational commitment at hospitals (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). When the morale is low, the employees will tend to find other options of employment, both locally and in foreign countries.

On the other hand, morale and retention may be greatly boosted with the help of positive organizational culture, participative leadership, employee recognition programs, and opportunities to increase their skills (Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman, 2010). The ability to invest in employee welfare, open communication channels, and career advancement opportunities increases the chances of establishing a long-term workforce stability within the hospital. Thus, it becomes important to investigate how employee morale affects retention in Kerala private hospitals to minimize the cost of turnover as well as to guarantee the maintenance of the quality of the patient care and health delivery sustainability.

The knowledge about this relationship can be of great help to the hospital administrators, policymakers and human resource managers who want to develop effective retention programs that suit the Kerala peculiarities of healthcare environment.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Healthcare is a labour-intensive industry that is highly reliant on the skilled human resources. The stability of the workforce is critical towards the patient safety, quality of services, and institutional sustainability. In India, healthcare is largely delivered by the private sector in which a significant portion of the infrastructure is comprised of hospitals (Central Bureau of Health Intelligence [CBHI], 2022). In Kerala, where the role of the private hospital in tertiary and specialty care is substantial, the problem of employee retention has become a strategic issue, especially among the nurses and the paramedical employees. The high rate of employee turnover in healthcare organizations creates problems of higher recruitment and training expenses, inefficiency, and lack of cohesion within the team as well as deteriorated patient care outcomes (Hayes et al., 2012). Kerala has been a traditional source of national and international migration of nurses (Percot, 2006; Nair and Healey, 2006). The desire to work in attractive jobs abroad and heavy workload and lack of growth opportunities in individual hospitals have magnified the turnover intentions among medical personnel in the state. Although the work done by previous researchers has explored job satisfaction, burnout, organizational commitment, and migration patterns as autonomous variables, there exist few empirical studies that present employee morale as a multidimensional phenomenon, which affects retention in the context of a private hospital in Kerala. Employee morale unites psychological health, work contentment, dedication, acknowledgment, and support by the leaders within an extensive climate system. According to research, morale related variables are a strong predictor of retention in any industry (Hom et al., 2017). In healthcare facilities, supportive leadership and favorable working conditions deter burnout and turnover intention (Aiken et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2019; Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Nevertheless, much of this data is based on the healthcare setting in Western countries, and region-specific research is required because of the migration trends, socio-economic status, and dynamics of the private sector in Kerala. The conditions under which private hospitals are competing are highly competitive and the stability of human resources directly impact patient satisfaction, accreditation standards, and the image of the institution. Thus, a study of the importance of employee morale on retention in privately owned hospitals in Kerala will fill a sore gap in context, theoretical and managerial skills. The research will be used to make contributions to evidence-based human resource practices in accordance with the healthcare ecosystem in the state.

Table 1. Dimensions of Employee Morale in Private Hospitals of Kerala

Sl. No.	Dimension	Description	Expected Influence on Retention
1	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with salary, workload, and job role	Positive
2	Organizational Commitment	Emotional attachment to the hospital	Positive
3	Leadership Support	Perceived support from supervisors and management	Positive
4	Recognition & Rewards	Fairness in performance appraisal and incentives	Positive
5	Work Environment	Physical and psychological workplace climate	Positive
6	Career Development	Opportunities for training and promotion	Positive

Table 1 shows the major dimensions of employee morale to be adopted in the research on the private hospitals in Kerala. The concept of employee morale is multidimensional and it determines the psychological attachment and intention of the employees to stay with the organization. The first dimension, Job Satisfaction, indicates the degree of satisfaction of the employees with the salary/ salary,

workload, and job responsibilities. According to previous studies, job satisfaction level leads to a significant decrease in turnover intention and enhance retention in health facilities. The second dimension Organizational Commitment is the level of emotional attachment and a sense of belonging that the employees of the hospital have. High affective commitment employees are likely to stay in their organisation even in competitive labour markets. Leadership Support is the extent to which the supervisors offer directions, support and treatment in a just manner. The supportive leadership increases the trust, engagement, and morale as well, positively affecting the retention decisions. Recognition and Rewards dimension refers to performance appraisal fairness, performance incentives and contribution recognition. Workers who believe that they are being rewarded fairly will show improved loyalty and less turnover intention. Work Environment entails the physical working conditions and the psychological climate such as teamwork, culture of safety and culture of communication. Favorable work environment will decrease stress and burnout which are important predictors of turnover in hospital environments. Lastly, Career Development is the career promotion, skill improvement, and professional development. Low career progression of employees has been noted as one of the reasons behind migration into and out of the sector among employees in the private healthcare sector in Kerala; hence, career development is likely to pave a strong positive impact on retention. On the whole, it is postulated that the six dimensions will be positively related to employee retention which constitute the conceptual base of the current research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

Job satisfaction is a major construct in organizational behaviour studies which is always known to be a major determinant of retaining employees. It is the degree to which the employees are in positive emotional states due to their appraisal of job experiences, such as pay, workload, job autonomy, interpersonal relations, and organizational policies. Theoretical basis of job satisfaction can be tracked until Frederick Herzberg, the Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959) which identifies intrinsic motivation (achievement, recognition, responsibility) and extrinsic hygiene (salary, working conditions, supervision). This theory states that although hygienic factors help to avoid dissatisfaction, intrinsic motivators are increasing genuine satisfaction and commitment.

Job satisfaction is more critical in healthcare organizations considering the emotional weight of work. In their systematic review of nurse turnover, Hayes et al. (2012) found job dissatisfaction to be amongst the most reliable predictors of voluntary turnover. Equally, Lu, Zhao, and While (2019), found that workload contentment, staffing, and remuneration levels had a substantial impact on turnover intention among nurses working at a hospital. The given findings are especially applicable to an overly demanding and emotionally intense healthcare setting in which a heavy workload and burnout tend to occur.

Tessema, Ready, and Embaye (2023) established that job satisfaction is also a strong predictor of employee retention in service industries, including the healthcare sector. Khan, Altaf, and Kundi (2024) established that workload stress is intermediated by job satisfaction and correlated with turnover intention in nurses. Park and Min (2023) also established that support in the organization and manageable workloads increase the retention intention of nurses by ensuring job satisfaction.

The workload intensity, excessive working hours, and low salary proportion relative to foreign opportunities in work, in the case of the Kerala context of the private hospitals, might have an adverse effect on job satisfaction. With the culture of migration among healthcare professionals in Kerala being high, job dissatisfaction might speed up the turnover decision-making. Thus, empowering job satisfaction strategies by providing equitable pay, workable workloads and participative management will most likely improve the retention results.

H1: Job satisfaction has a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

2.2 Organizational Commitment and Employee Retention

Organizational commitment is the psychological commitment that employees have towards their organization. Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) theorized the concept of commitment which included affective bonding, connection with organizational interests and readiness to work hard on behalf of the organization. High affective commitment employees are less likely to leave work since they feel that the organizations share common values.

In their overall review of employee turnover literature, Hom et al. (2017) established that the organizational commitment is among the best predictors of retention across industries. This is very important in the healthcare environment whereby the provision of the services depends on teamwork, institutional memory, and the relationship between patients and healthcare providers. Dedicated employees are stronger, less absentee and more organisational citizens. Rombaut and Guerry (2022) established that the affective commitment has a significant negative effect on the turnover intention of healthcare professionals. According to Nguyen and Tran (2023), organizational trust enhances the affective commitment, as well as reduces the intention of migration in nurses. Alshaabani et al. (2024) also found that the organizational commitment is also a significant predictor of retention, and it is significantly predicted by the job embeddedness factors. According to the literature, the role of work-life balance in enhancing the productivity of workers and the well-being of organizations cannot be undermined. It has been shown that employee performance and job satisfaction are enhanced by flexible working arrangements (remote work and altered work hours). To establish an enjoyable workplace culture, which increases employee engagement, wellness programs and managerial aid are necessary.

The international migration opportunities present a special challenge to the Kerala hospitals that are privately operated. With attractive external job opportunities, good organizational commitment will moderate the turnover intentions of employees. The emotional attachment between the personnel of the hospitals can be enhanced when the culture of inclusion, openness, and well-timed communication and alignment of values are reinforced.

H2: Organizational commitment has a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

2.3 Leadership Support and Employee Retention

Leadership support determines the perceptions of the employees towards the managerial accessibility, fairness, empathy and encouragement. Supportive leadership leads to the promotion of psychological safety, engagement, and trust, which all promote the development of morale. The transformational theory of leadership opines that leaders who motivate, inspire, and acknowledge employees can greatly affect the behaviours of retention.

Aiken et al. (2012) also have discovered that, hospitals with supportive leadership and participative management reported lower burnout and job dissatisfaction among nurses. Allen, Bryant and Vardaman (2010) also highlighted that the strategy of retaining employees relies on the supervisory relationship since immediate supervisors tend to influence the daily working experiences. According to Specchia et al. (2021), supportive leadership has a massive impact on burnout and turnover intention, which decreases. Alatawi et al. (2023) demonstrated that the connection among stress, turnover intention, and supervisor support is mediated in a hospital environment. Zhang et al. (2024) also established that transformational leadership has a positive effect on retention intention in terms of psychological safety and job satisfaction. The support of the management could be influenced by the hierarchical organizational conditions and performance pressure in the sphere of the private hospital in Kerala. Motivation and loss of morale can be boosted by having a leader who offers constructive feedback, rewards employees who work hard, and engages them in decision-making, which will decrease turnover intention. Leadership support is therefore a strategic organizational tool that affects the results of retention.

H3: Leadership support has a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

2.4. Recognition and Rewards and Employee Retention

Rewards and recognition are very critical motivation tools in an organization setting. Herzberg (1959) has found recognition as one of the main intrinsic motivators of job satisfaction and commitment. Just and open reward system strengthens the employees with a sense of worth and justice within the organization. It has been found that perceived unfairness in compensation or appraisal of performance adds to dissatisfaction and intention to turnover (Allen et al., 2010). Performance requirement is often high and emotional labour is often high in healthcare institutions making recognition of effort an essential aspect in maintaining morale. Aboramadan et al. (2022) discovered that in the medical workplace, organizational justice plays a crucial role in decreasing the turnover intention. Kundu and Lata (2023) asserted that recognition practices increase the retention intention due to the engagement of employees. According to a study conducted by Pham, Nguyen, and Phan (2024), performance-based incentives are a very efficient way of retaining nurses in emerging economies.

Patel (2025) This is a review paper that examines the effectiveness of work-life balance (WLB) policies introduced by the government in the context of India, a nation that has undergone rapid socio-economic changes. It evaluates the statistical implications of these policies by way of an extensive literature review and an overview of existing government programs. The perceived inequality in the pay scales, the lack of performance incentives and the absence of structured rewards systems in the case of the Kerala private hospitals can undermine the loyalty of the employees. On the other hand, morale and retention can be reinforced through structured recognition programs, performance-based incentives and appreciation mechanisms.

H4: Recognition and rewards have a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

2.5. Work Environment and Employee Retention

Work environment refers to the physical (infrastructure, equipment, staffing levels) as well as psychological climate (teamwork, communication, safety culture). Favorable workplace increases morale, and stressful and unsafe working conditions are causes of burnout.

As Maslach and Leiter (2016) pointed out, burnout, which is defined by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, is a significant predictor of low-quality work environments and intention to leave. Aiken et al. (2012) proved that staffing ratios and favorable working climates are the main factors in dissatisfaction reduction and nurse retention. Dall'Ora et al. (2022) discovered that the adequacy of the staffing and the shift are strongly related to the retention outcomes. Wei et al. (2023) have reported that a positive work climate leads to burnout reduction and helps to boost the intention to stay among nurses. Alrawashdeh et al. (2024) also demonstrated that safe and conducive working conditions reduce the turnover intention in post-pandemic healthcare systems significantly. Ruksana K A (2026) The retention of employees is a pressing concern in the Indian booming business in private healthcare. Healthcare workers are likely to experience a hectic workload and other personal challenges and work-life balance (WLB) is a very important factor that affects their retention. To explore the effects of WLB on retention in private hospitals, the paper will generalize the recent Indian researches, and original survey research findings.

In Kerala, private hospitals have a tendency to work with large patient loads and in competition. Adequacy of staffing, safe working environment and collaborative culture can hugely affect retention intentions of the employees.

H5: Work environment has a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

2.6. Career Development and Employee Retention

Career development is planned opportunities concerning professional growth, promotion, development of skills, and further learning. When employees feel that they have long term career growth in an organization, chances of them joining other organizations are minimal.

Career growth opportunities are one of the retention factors that were identified by Allen et al. (2010). Constant training and specialization tracks, which are applied in healthcare industries, promote the competence and commitment levels in the organization. The study conducted by Akkermans et al. (2023) identified perceived career development opportunities as the important factors decreasing the turnover intention. Chaudhuri et al. (2022) discovered the career progression pathways as one of the determinants of nurse retention within South Asian healthcare systems. Al-Mansour (2024) proved that organizational commitment and retention can be maximized with the help of structured training programs.

In Kerala, the lack of development opportunities in the domestic hospitals tends to make health care providers move to other countries or change organizations. Moral and long-term retention can be enhanced by setting up clear promotion principles, training and educational sponsorships.

H6: Career development opportunities have a significant positive influence on employee retention in private hospitals of Kerala.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Design and Study Area

The current research assumed a quantitative cross-sectional research design in order to investigate the effect of employee morale on retention within the private hospitals in Kerala. Primary data was gathered using a survey-based method which involved healthcare employees. The sample size was done in three major districts of Kerala namely Ernakulam, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram in selected hospitals that are privately operated. Such districts were selected because they have a high density of multi-specialty and tertiary private hospitals and play a significant role in the healthcare delivery system in the state. The research was conducted during three months.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population to be target consisted of all the healthcare workers employed in registered private hospitals in the selected districts. This involved the nursing staff, allied professionals, administrative personnel, and the support staff. The number of employees in the hospitals of the sampled hospitals was estimated to be about 1,150. The minimum number of samples that was calculated to be required was 289 using the Cochran (1977) formula of sample size with 95% confidence level and 5% margin error. Questionnaires of 320 were sent to participants out of which 300 were returned to the researcher and were counted in the analysis, representing a response rate of 93.75%. A stratified random sampling method was used to guarantee proportional representation of staff categories. The distribution of the sample was as given:

Table 2 Sample respondents

Staff Category	Number of Respondents
Nursing Staff	165
Allied Health Professionals	60
Administrative Staff	40
Support Staff	35
Total	300

3.3 Measurement Instrument and Data Analysis

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data with two sections. The initial part included demographic information, including age, gender, the level of education, years of experience, and job type. The second section was a measure of the study variables. The independent variable was employee morale which was measured as a multidimensional construct with six dimensions such as job satisfaction,

organizational commitment, leadership support, recognition and rewards, work environment and career development. Employee morale was measured with the aid of 24 items. The dependent variable was employee retention, which was measured with 5 items that evaluated the intention of employees to stay in the organization which they were working in. All of them were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The reliability was measured using Cronbach Alpha with a value exceeding 0.7 that showed acceptable reliability. Expert review was used to achieve content validity and exploratory factor analysis was used to test construct validity. The analysis of the data was done in SPSS (Version 26). The statistical methods involved descriptive statistics, and Pearson correlation analysis as well as multiple linear regression analysis to establish the effect of employee morale dimensions on retention. The level of statistical significance was taken to be $p < 0.05$.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The computation of descriptive statistics was done to analyze the general opinion of employees on the dimensions of morale and retention intention. Table 3 shows the values of the mean and standard deviation.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (n = 300)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Job Satisfaction	3.68	0.74	Moderately High
Organizational Commitment	3.72	0.69	Moderately High
Leadership Support	3.62	0.81	Moderate
Recognition & Rewards	3.42	0.88	Moderate
Work Environment	3.75	0.72	High
Career Development	3.38	0.90	Moderate
Employee Retention	3.70	0.76	Moderately High

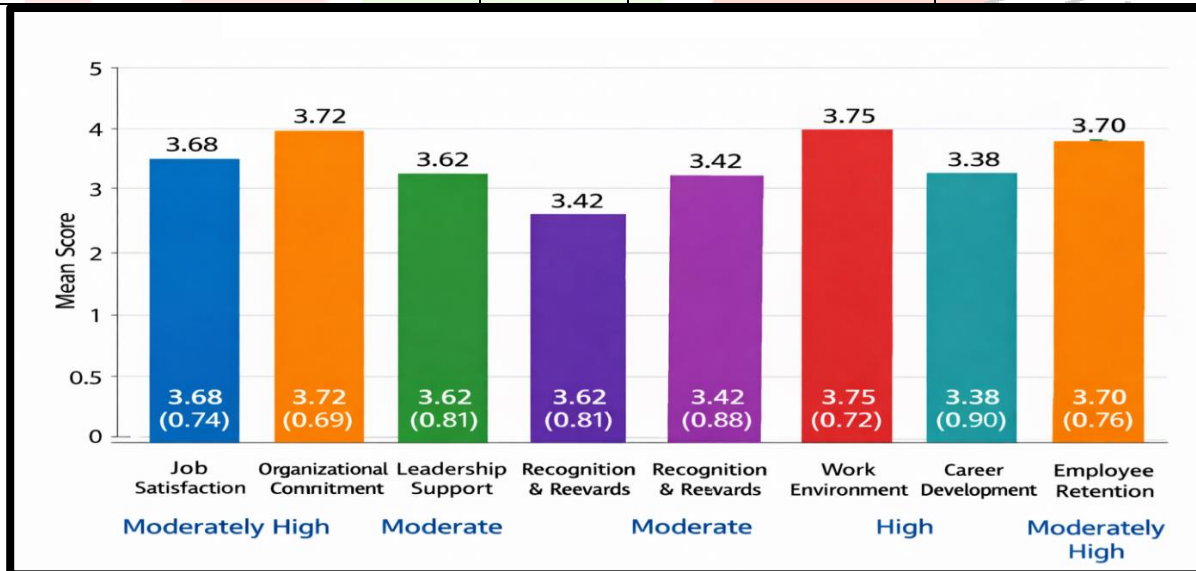


Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

The descriptive findings reveal that employees tended to rate the morale perception in the Kerala private hospitals moderately. Work Environment had the largest average score ($M = 3.75$) indicating that the respondents have a relatively positive view in the way their working conditions, teamwork, and infrastructure are. This indicates that the physical and organizational climates in the selected districts might have been acceptable in the private hospitals. The mean values of Organizational Declaration ($M = 3.72$) and Job Satisfaction ($M = 3.68$) were also rather high, which means that workers show quite a decent attachment and satisfaction to their companies. Nevertheless, the mean scores of Career Development ($M = 3.38$) and Recognition and Rewards ($M = 3.42$) were relatively lower, which suggests that employees might feel that there are no opportunities to grow, and rewarding mechanisms are inadequate. The average

Employee Retention value ($M = 3.70$) indicates a mildly high level of intent of employees in their organizations to retain. Nonetheless, the variability (SDs ranged between 0.69 and 0.90) reveals the variation in the perception of different respondents, which should be considered in the areas where managers need to work on.

4.2. Reliability Analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the measurement instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each construct.

Table 4: Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Satisfaction	4	0.82
Organizational Commitment	4	0.85
Leadership Support	4	0.80
Recognition & Rewards	4	0.78
Work Environment	4	0.84
Career Development	4	0.76
Employee Retention	5	0.88

The constructs were all found to have high Cronbachs Alpha values of at least the recommended Alpha of 0.70 which is good internal consistency and reliability of the scale. Employee Retention ($\alpha = 0.88$) had the best reliability to prove that the items have always measured retention intention. Career Development ($\alpha = 0.76$), though a bit lower than other constructs, did not exceed acceptable limits. The findings verify that the questionnaire questions were appropriate to quantify the dimensions of morale and retention intention among the healthcare staff working in the private hospitals.

4.3. Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the strengths of correlations and directions of relationships between morale dimensions and employee retention.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	JS	OC	LS	RR	WE	CD	ER
Job Satisfaction (JS)	1						
Organizational Commitment (OC)	.62**	1					
Leadership Support (LS)	.58**	.65**	1				
Recognition & Rewards (RR)	.55**	.60**	.63**	1			
Work Environment (WE)	.59**	.67**	.70**	.64**	1		
Career Development (CD)	.50**	.56**	.61**	.66**	.60**	1	
Employee Retention (ER)	.68**	.72**	.65**	.61**	.70**	.59**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The outcome of the correlation shows that all the dimensions of employee morale are positively related to employee retention at significant levels ($p < 0.01$). Organizational commitment and Employee Retention had the highest correlation ($r = .72$) and then was closely followed by Work Environment and Job Satisfaction ($r = .68$). These results suggest that workers who are emotionally engaged to their organizations and have a positive view of the work environment will be retained in the organization. The correspondence between positive interrelationships between the dimensions of morale imply that morale dimensions are interrelated constituents of overall employee morale. The findings give early justification to all hypotheses put forward, and thus additional regression analysis is necessary.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

To establish the predictive effects of the dimensions of employee morale on retention, a multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 6: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
0.81	0.66	0.65	94.32	0.000

The model explains 66% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.66$) in employee retention. The F-value (94.32, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. This suggests that employee morale dimensions collectively have substantial explanatory power in predicting retention intention.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Job Satisfaction	0.28	5.12	0.000
Organizational Commitment	0.31	6.05	0.000
Leadership Support	0.19	3.84	0.000
Recognition & Rewards	0.14	2.98	0.003
Work Environment	0.27	5.76	0.000
Career Development	0.11	2.21	0.028

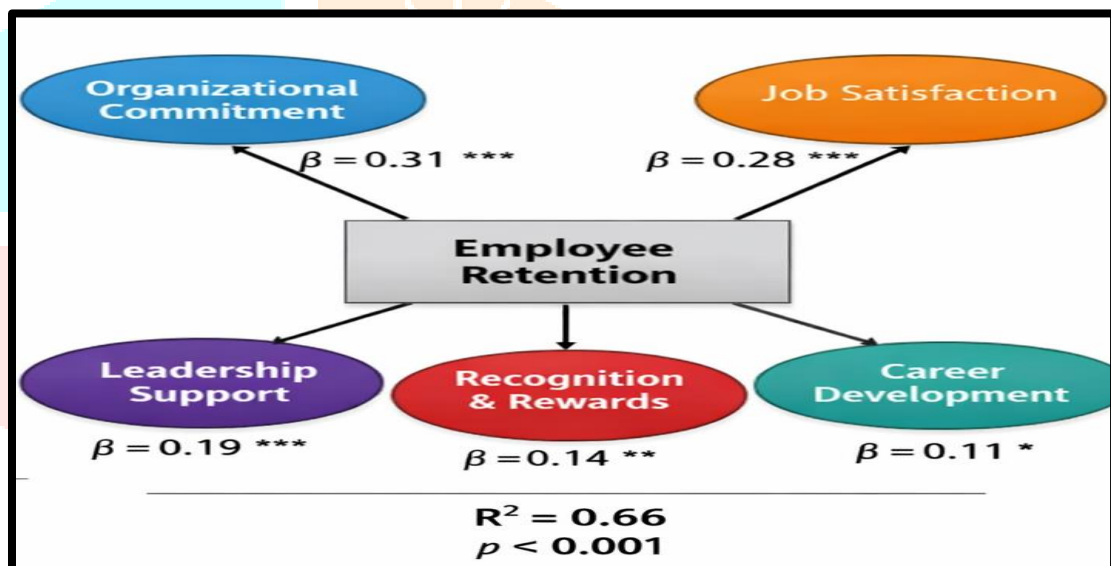


Figure 2. Path Coefficient of Employee Retention Model

The results of the regression model have shown that the six dimensions of morale are significant predictors of employee retention ($p < 0.05$) with Organizational Commitment ($\beta = 0.31$) being the most predictive dimension and thus Emotional attachment is important in retaining healthcare workers. Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.28$) and Work Environment ($\beta = 0.27$) also had high predictive values, which highlights the significance of favorable conditions and the level of satisfaction. The Leadership Support ($\beta = 0.19$) had moderate effects explaining how management behaviour determines the results of retention. Though the beta of Recognition and Rewards ($\beta = 0.14$) and Career Development ($\beta = 0.11$) were comparatively low, they were also significant and therefore, growth opportunities and appreciation systems have a significant role to play in retention decisions. The results are consistent with the previous studies that underscore morale-related constructs to decrease turnover intention at healthcare organizations.

4.5 Discussion

The current research investigated the effect of the dimensions of employee morale on retention within the private hospitals in Kerala. The results indicate that the six dimensions of morale have a significant effect on retention of employees. Each of the constructs is discussed below.

4.5.1. Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

The findings revealed that job satisfaction plays a major positive role in the employee retention ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Workers who indicated their contentedness in their salary, workload, job role, and working conditions were more robust in the intention to stay in their organizations. The workload intensity and patient demand are usually high in the context of the private hospitals in Kerala. Workers feel that they are treated fairly in terms of assignment and remuneration and this enhances their psychological attachment to the company. The mean score of job satisfaction ($M = 3.68$) is rather high, which indicates that the employees are only moderately satisfied, and there is still a room to improve. This result confirms motivational theories that state that contented employees are less inclined to find other jobs. Job satisfaction is a stabilizing factor against turnover in a healthcare setting where emotional labour plays an important role. As such, workload balance and fair compensation policy are the two areas that should be given priority by the hospital administrators to improve retention.

4.5.2. Organizational Commitment and Employee Retention

Organizational commitment was found to be the most significant predictor of retention ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). The intention to remain among the employees was found to be much stronger among employees who replied that they were more emotionally attached and loyal to their hospitals. Such a conclusion is especially applicable to Kerala, where migration possibilities, including national and international ones, are common among medical workers. Even in the face of external opportunities, high affective commitment is more likely to remain because of employees being emotionally attached, being identified to organisational objectives and feeling part of the organisation. The fact that the correlation between organizational commitment and retention is high ($r = .72$) suggests that employee engagement programs, internal communication, and value alignment can be used to greatly decrease voluntary turnover. The willingness to stick in a job is a psychological tie that is used to offset external job options.

4.5.3. Leadership Support and Employee Retention

The positive and statistically significant effects on retention were observed to be caused by leadership support ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$). Workers who viewed their superiors as supportive, friendly, and impartial showed more tendencies of remaining in the organization. Even though the impact was moderate as compared to other aspects, leadership is a significant factor that determines the day-to-day work experiences. In hospitals, stress levels, motivation, and morale are directly determined by immediate supervisors. Inadequate supportive leadership may be a cause of burnout and dissatisfaction. The results imply that managerial training programs that emphasize on transformational and participative leadership styles can boost morale and decrease turnover intention in privately-owned hospitals.

4.5.4. Recognition and Rewards and Employee Retention

The effect of recognition and rewards on retention was quite low ($p = 0.003$) as compared to other variables ($\beta = 0.14$). The employees who felt that there was fair system of performance appraisal and appreciation mechanisms expressed greater retention intention. The average score ($M = 3.42$) shows that the practices of recognition in the private hospitals might not be optimized entirely. Employees are also likely to resign when they do not feel valued or when they feel that there is unfairness in the reward systems. Motivation in the healthcare setting through non-financial means, i.e., appreciation schemes, awards, and social recognition, can be quite supportive of morale especially in competitive healthcare settings. Enhancing workforce stability could therefore be boosted by strengthening transparent and performance-based reward system.

4.5.5. Work Environment and Employee Retention

The role of work environment was shown as strong and significant in the retention ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). It also had the greatest mean score ($M = 3.75$), which indicates fairly positive conditions in the workplace. Positive work environment comprises of proper staffing, group work, level of safety, and encouraging organizational culture. Employees in healthcare facilities are exposed to a lot of pressure and emotional demands that can cause burnout and mental stress, which is minimized by a conducive environment. The high correlation of work environment and retention ($r = .70$) underscores the need to ameliorate the infrastructure, create a working environment that encourages teamwork, and has workloads that are manageable. Health institutions that develop a good climate will maintain qualified professionals.

4.5.6. Career Development and Employee Retention

Career development opportunities also played a significant role in predicting retention ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.028$), but this was the least predictor among the six variables. The average ($M = 3.38$) is relatively lower, which implies that the employees believe that they have fewer growth and promotion opportunities in the private hospitals. In Kerala, there is a lack of internal promotion routes, which further promotes the migration or movement of organizations by healthcare professionals. Training programs, promotion policies, and opportunities of continuing education can benefit long-term retention. Although its statistical contribution was less than that of commitment and satisfaction, career development is strategically significant to solve the problem of long-term retention. The results all confirm that employee morale is a multi-dimensional variable with a great impact on retention in Kerala based, private hospitals. The major predictors were the organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and the work environment, with other predictors necessary, such as leadership support, recognition, and career development. The model that explains 66% of retention variation shows a great predictive ability and it is important to note that psychological and organizational aspects are influential when it comes to stability of the workforce. In the case of private hospitals within Kerala, the emphasis on the morale enhancement policies, especially the enhancement of commitment and working conditions, may be considered the efficient retention tools in the highly competitive and migration-friendly healthcare setting.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current research examined how the morale of employees affects retention in Kerala State private hospitals. The results demonstrate that the morale among the employees has a significant and positive influence on the intention of the employees to stay in their respective organizations. Absence of employee turnover was found to be seriously predicted by all six dimensions of morale, which include, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership support, recognition and rewards, work environment and career development. Organizational commitment was the most significant one with job satisfaction and work environment, which implies that the emotional attachment, job roles satisfaction, and favorable working conditions are key issues that contribute to maintaining workforce stability. Even though recognition and rewards and career development opportunities had a relatively lower role, they are still significant elements that have an impact on retention decisions of employees. The regression model that explains 66 percent of employee retention variance has shown high levels of explanatory strength and proves that factors that relate to morale are central in overcoming the turnover problems in the Kerala private healthcare sector. In a state where the rate of migration among the healthcare staff and competitive hiring market, the rise in the morale of the employees is a strategic need rather than an administrative role. The researchers find that financial aspects of retention in private hospitals are not the only ones, but also psychological attachment, management support, and organizational climate. Hence, the enhancement of the morale areas is the key to providing long-term workforce stability, quality of service provision, and preserving the institutional image. According to the results, the management of the hospital privately is advised to concentrate on the strategy of overall morale improvement to enhance retention. To enhance organizational commitment, hospitals are recommended to ensure that they offer a sense of engagement to their employees, enhance open communication, and participative decision-making. Turnover intentions

can be further decreased with the improvement of job satisfaction by means of fair distribution of workload, competitive pay scales, and demarcation of responsibilities. Managerial training programs that focus on positive supervisor employee relationships should be used to improve leadership by promoting supportive and transformational leadership styles since they promise high morale. Hospitals should also introduce open and performance-oriented recognition systems to make the employees feel useful and appreciated. The provision of suitable staffing, safe working conditions, and the working environment on the basis of a positive organizational culture will contribute to the mitigation of burnout and dissatisfaction. Migration and job change can be discouraged by increasing the availability of structured career development opportunities such as training, professional development, and well-defined promotion channels. On the policy level, the retention-oriented human resources policies in private hospitals and healthcare authorities are to be formulated and the turnover patterns observed continuously to design evidence-based interventions. All in all, to maintain the stability of the workforce within the Kerala private healthcare sector, investing into the employee morale is necessary. When the morale dimensions are addressed proactively by the hospitals, there is a high possibility that employee retention will be enhanced, quality patient care will improve and organizational long-term effectiveness will be attained.

5.1 Future Directions for Research

Even though the current research has given valuable information regarding the role of employee morale in retention of employees in the Kerala-based private hospitals, there are still areas in which future research can be conducted. Firstly, the research was cross-sectional, which is a design that will only capture the perceptions of the employees at one moment. Further research can use longitudinal research designs to look at how morale and retention intentions vary over time and especially in relation to organizational policy changes, leadership change, or changes to the healthcare system. Second, the current study was restricted to some districts in Kerala. Future research can widen the geographic boundaries to cover other districts or carry out comparative research between the private and public hospitals to determine the existence of structural and policy level disparities that affect morale and retention. Cross-state comparison or cross country comparison of healthcare facilities within India or abroad would also give more contextual learning. Third, although in this study six key dimensions of employee morale were considered, it is possible in the future that more psychological and organizational variables can be included in research, e.g., burnout, work-life balance, emotional intelligence, organizational justice, and employee engagement, and it can be assumed that a more rounded model can be developed. Mediating and moderating variables (gender, experience level, or intention to migrate) might also contribute to improving knowledge of the dynamics of retention. Fourth, qualitative methods of research, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, can be used to present more insights into the lived experiences of the employees and other contextual elements that contribute to the morale in private hospitals. Quantitative results may be enhanced by using mixed-method research designs that may enhance theoretical building. Lastly, more sophisticated methods of analysis can be used in future studies to examine complicated interrelations between dimensions of morale and retention results through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). It would also be important to the theory and practice to examine the long-term effect of specific morale-enhancement interventions on the actual turnover rates and not intention to stay. To sum up, further methodological development and geographic expansion and theory will aid in creating a more detailed picture of employee morale and retention in healthcare organizations and contribute to the sustainable workforce management in the changing healthcare sector.

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