

**Workplace Barriers Affecting Quality of Life for ICU Nurses During the COVID-19
Pandemic: A Literature Review**

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Abstract

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic, first identified in late 2019 and officially declared a global pandemic in March 2020, had a profound and lasting impact on healthcare workers, particularly Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurses. ICU nurses have faced significant psychological and physiological challenges, resulting in a diminished quality of life (QOL). Workplace barriers such as staffing shortages, limited resources, inadequate PPE, and a lack of support have exacerbated stress and burnout, compromising nurse well-being and patient care.

Aim: Explore the relationship between ICU nurses' quality of life and the hospital workplace environment during COVID-19. The literature review aims to identify employment challenges that affected ICU nurses' QOL and offer recommendations to mitigate burnout, depression, PTSD, anxiety, and other issues related to the hectic work environment during COVID-19.

Design/Methods: A systematic literature review was performed using the CINAHL database through the access of the University of Texas at Austin in which 92 articles resulted in the search. Keywords used included "COVID-19", "coronavirus", "ICU", "critical care", "burnout", "stress", "quality of life", "nurses", and similar vocabulary terms. Inclusion criteria consisted of being peer-reviewed, published after 2019, acute care focused, and primary research. Out of the 92 articles, only 21 articles were utilized, and data extraction was performed using a table that consisted of location, study design, population, conclusion, etc.

Results: A pie chart was developed to illustrate the prevalence of workplace factors that negatively impacted nurses' QOL and caused negative psychological effects during COVID-19. Common themes that led to an overall decrease in QOL included a shortage of PPE, high patient-nurse ratios, lack of leadership, and no support. Moreover, a bar chart was then created to depict the solutions mentioned in the articles such as increasing training and education, increasing access to mental health support, and thorough communication.

Conclusions: ICU nurses endured both physical and psychological distress amidst COVID-19 and it led to a decrease in overall quality of life. Workplace barriers that were identified during the pandemic included nursing shortages, lack of equipment, and no support which created a hectic environment. The findings of this literature review highlight the relationship of the work environment in influencing a nurse's QOL and suggest that reducing workplace stressors can drastically improve mental health, productivity, and work-life satisfaction.