

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO INCREASE SATISFACTION AND RETENTION OF HEALTH WORKERS IN MUNA REGENCY

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Submitted : 23-10-2024, Accepted : 2-11-2024, Published : 23-12-2024

ABSTRACT

Improving job satisfaction and retention of healthcare workers is a global challenge impacting the quality of healthcare services, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. In Muna Regency, unequal distribution of healthcare personnel, limited workplace facilities, and employment status uncertainty are critical issues affecting the sustainability of healthcare services. This study addresses a knowledge gap regarding management strategies that enhance job satisfaction and retention in resource-limited areas. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with five key informants, including policymakers, field practitioners, and professional organizations. The findings reveal that improving workplace facilities, technology-based training, and participatory policies significantly contribute to enhancing satisfaction and retention among healthcare workers. These findings provide practical implications for the development of more comprehensive health policies, particularly to support sustainable healthcare services in rural areas.

Keywords: healthcare worker retention; human resources for health; remote areas; strategic management

INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction and retention of health workers is a crucial aspect in ensuring optimal quality of health services. High job satisfaction in health workers contributes significantly to improved organizational performance and commitment, which in turn can reduce turnover rates (Pradipta & Suwandana, 2019). Conversely, job dissatisfaction can lead to an increase in the intention to leave work, which negatively impacts the stability and continuity of health services (Anggara et al., 2020). Therefore, effective management strategies are needed to increase the satisfaction and retention of health workers. This approach includes career development, fair compensation, and a conducive work environment (Suwandana, 2016).

In Indonesia, various studies have highlighted the importance of human resource management in the health sector. A study by Fitriantini et al. (2019) shows that workload, job satisfaction, and work stress have a significant influence on the intention to change jobs in

contract health workers. In addition, research by Prasetyo et al. (2023) emphasizes that employee engagement plays an important role in employee retention. Factors such as compensation, career development, and job satisfaction were found to have a direct impact on health worker retention (Pradipta & Suwandana, 2019). These findings confirm that effective management in these aspects can increase healthcare worker satisfaction and retention. The local context in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, shows its own challenges in the management of health workers. The uneven distribution of health workers between remote and central areas is one of the main problems (B.H., personal communication, 2024). Many health workers are reluctant to work in remote areas due to a lack of facilities and logistical support. In addition, the uncertainty of work status, especially for honorary workers, adds to the complexity of the problem (R.A., personal communication, 2024). This condition requires a management strategy that is tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the region.

Effective management strategies can include improving work facilities, procuring adequate medical equipment, and timely payment of incentives (B.H., personal communication, 2024). In addition, training and competency development programs can periodically increase the professionalism and job satisfaction of health workers (D.L., personal communication, 2024). The implementation of flexible work schedules and monthly discussion forums can also help handle complaints and increase job satisfaction (S.F., personal communication, 2024). These approaches need to be integrated in management policies to achieve optimal results. Collaboration between local governments, professional organizations, and educational institutions is key to the implementation of effective management strategies. Professional organizations such as the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (PAFI) can act as a bridge between health workers and local governments to voice their aspirations (M.T., personal communication, 2024). Meanwhile, educational institutions can provide strategic recommendations based on research and data analysis (D.L., personal communication, 2024). This collaboration is expected to produce comprehensive and targeted policies.

Thus, this study aims to analyze management strategies that can increase the satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, it is hoped that a deep understanding of the problems faced and solutions that can be applied can be obtained. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for local governments and other stakeholders in formulating effective policies. In addition, these findings are also expected to contribute to the literature on human resource management in the health sector in Indonesia. This gap is especially seen in disadvantaged, remote, border, and archipelago areas, where the distribution of health workers is unbalanced (Health PPSDM Agency, 2020). Some regions have a surplus of health workers, while others experience significant shortages. This imbalance hinders the achievement of optimal health service standards. In addition, the lack of health workers in rural and remote areas is a serious concern in developing countries, including Indonesia.

Not all health workers are willing to be placed in remote areas. The limited facilities and infrastructure in rural and remote areas are the main reason for this reluctance. This condition has an impact on uneven health services in Indonesia. In addition, the shortage of trained workers in hospitals is also a challenge in providing quality health services. This situation is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which has increased the demand for healthcare services. Not all health workers are satisfied with their working conditions. Environmental factors such as low salaries, limited educational development opportunities, and inadequate facilities and equipment affect the job satisfaction of health workers. Burnout is also the cause of low job satisfaction and has a significant impact on the risk of medical errors. This negative impact needs to be anticipated through increasing job satisfaction among health workers. The management of their psychological factors is important to prevent adverse effects on patients.

Not all human resource management policies in the health sector run without challenges. The shortage of trained manpower, especially in the medical and paramedic fields, is one of the main challenges. The increasing demand for health services is not balanced by an adequate supply of labor. In addition, demographic changes and technological advances add complexity in the management of human resources in hospitals. These challenges affect the quality of health services provided to the community.

Not all regions have adequate health facilities. Access to health services in rural areas is still limited. Although many health facilities are available in major cities, people in rural areas have difficulty accessing such services. This condition causes inequality in health services in Indonesia. Efforts to improve the accessibility of health services in rural areas need to be improved. Not all health workers last long in their assignment areas, especially in remote areas. Retention of health workers in remote areas is a challenge that requires long-term policy interventions. Some interventions have not been carried out to significantly increase the retention of medical workers in the region. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed to attract and retain health workers in remote areas in the long term. Effective policies can help address these challenges.

The importance of this research lies in the urgency of increasing the satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency, which has unique challenges in the distribution and management of health human resources. This problem is crucial because the inequality in the distribution of health workers between central and remote areas hinders the achievement of equitable and quality health services. In addition, unsupportive working conditions, such as limited facilities, uncertainty of employment status, and limited opportunities for competency development, further exacerbate the situation. This research makes an important contribution by identifying management strategies that not only solve the symptoms of the problem, but also target the root of the problem, such as non-adaptive policies and lack of cross-sector collaboration. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to be a real solution that can be adopted by local governments and stakeholders to improve the health worker management system in a sustainable manner. Therefore, this study aims to explore effective management strategies in increasing the satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. The main focus of the research is to understand the factors that affect job satisfaction and retention, as well as to identify measures that can be implemented to address the challenges faced by healthcare workers in the region. This research also aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that are relevant to the local context of Muna Regency, so that the resulting policies can be more targeted. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this research seeks to explore the perspectives of informants from various layers, ranging from policymakers, implementers in the field, to professional organizations and academics. Thus, the results of this research are expected not only to enrich academic literature, but also to have a practical impact in supporting the sustainability of health services in Muna Regency.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design that aims to describe management strategies in increasing satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. This approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon in depth through data collection based on direct interviews with key informants. Informants are selected purposively based on the relevance of their roles and involvement in the management of health workers in Muna Regency. Qualitative descriptive methods are often used in health research to explain complex social phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2011). This approach is considered appropriate to explore information related to management policies, challenges, and solutions proposed by informants (Bungin, 2011).

This research instrument is in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines designed to explore perceptions, experiences, and recommendations from informants related to health worker management strategies. The interview guidelines cover several key themes, such as management policies, retention constraints, and efforts to increase health worker satisfaction. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with five key informants, namely the Head of the Muna Regency Health Office, the Head of the Health Center, representatives of honorary staff, professional organizations, and academics. Interviews are considered effective in obtaining qualitative data because they allow for in-depth exploration of the informant's perspective (Patton, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data validation is carried out through source triangulation to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained.

The research procedure involves several stages, starting from the preparation of interview guidelines, informant selection, interview implementation, to data analysis. Interviews are conducted directly at the location or through online media to accommodate the limited accessibility of informants. The data obtained were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify patterns and themes that are relevant to the research objectives. The process of thematic analysis refers to the steps proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), which include data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, and interpretation of findings. Researchers seek to maintain objectivity during the analysis process by referring to the standard qualitative research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study finds various strategies implemented by related parties in increasing job satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency, as well as the challenges faced in their implementation. The Head of the Muna Regency Health Office revealed that efforts to improve work facilities at the Health Center, such as the procurement of adequate medical equipment, are one of the main strategies. In addition, timely payment of incentives is also a priority despite obstacles in budget allocation. This shows that there is awareness from the government of the importance of the welfare of health workers in supporting the sustainability of health services. In addition, the regular training program in collaboration with the Ministry of Health is expected to be able to improve the competence of health workers in this region. As quoted from the Head of the Health Office, "We encourage health workers to take part in certified online training so that they can continue to improve the quality of service."

At the primary service level, the results of interviews with the Head of the Waara Health Center emphasized the importance of creating a comfortable work environment as one of the main strategies to increase job satisfaction for health workers. This is realized through flexible working hours and monthly discussion forums to accommodate input and complaints from health workers. The Head of the Waara Health Center stated that the biggest challenge faced is maintaining the motivation of contract workers who are still facing uncertainty about their employment status. This statement is relevant in describing the complexity of management at the level of primary health facilities, especially in the context of areas with limited resources. As quoted, "We ensure that health workers' complaints are followed up in coordination with the Health Office," indicating a collaborative effort in resolving internal problems.

On the other hand, representatives of honorary health workers highlighted the uncertainty of work status as one of the biggest challenges. The case of the disappearance of the name of honorary personnel from the database of the State Civil Service Agency (BKN) is a serious concern in this context. This emphasizes the need for a clearer guarantee of work status and a more transparent system to maintain the work motivation of honorary workers. Representatives of honorary personnel also hope that there will be a regular competency

development program to improve their professionalism. "We still want to survive, but hope that there will be better support in the form of facilities and welfare," said the informant, pointing out the importance of non-material support aspects in increasing the retention of health workers.

The perspective of professional organizations is also an important part of this research. The Chairman of the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (PAFI) of Muna Regency highlighted the organization's efforts in voicing the aspirations of health workers through special training and clinical pharmacy management education. In addition, the proposal to provide additional incentives for health workers in remote areas and the improvement of supporting facilities such as official housing are the main recommendations. This is relevant in the context of strengthening collaboration between professional organizations and local governments. The informant's statement, "We are trying to be a bridge between health workers and local governments," emphasized the importance of the role of professional organizations in fighting for the welfare of their members. Collaboration between academics and local governments also makes a significant contribution to efforts to increase the retention of health workers. Representatives of the Faculty of Public Health, Universitas Airlangga emphasized the importance of involving health workers in policy formulation to increase a sense of belonging and job satisfaction. In addition, a technology-based monitoring and evaluation system is recommended to be implemented to systematically monitor job satisfaction. The informant said, "We have helped the Health Office develop a more structured work plan, including a strategy for equitable distribution of health workers," pointing out the importance of a data-driven approach in policymaking.

This study identifies several effective management strategies, such as improving work facilities, periodic training, and participatory-based policy formulation. However, challenges such as inequality in the distribution of health workers, uncertainty in employment status, and limited facilities in remote areas are still the main obstacles. Therefore, greater commitment from all parties is needed to create a supportive work environment, as well as policies that can improve the welfare and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of health management strategies in similar regions. This study shows that improving work facilities is one of the important factors in increasing the satisfaction of health workers in Muna Regency. The Head of the Health Office revealed that the procurement of medical equipment and the improvement of Puskesmas infrastructure are priorities. However, limited budget allocation is an obstacle in the implementation of this policy. This creates a gap between the needs of health workers and the availability of resources, especially in remote areas. Efforts such as certified online training that is carried out periodically are expected to close the competency gap and improve the quality of service.

At the health facility level, the Waara Health Center is an example of implementing a strategy oriented to the welfare of health workers. The Head of the Health Center emphasized the importance of flexible work schedules and discussion forums as a space to resolve labor complaints. The main challenge found is the uncertainty of the employment status of contract workers, which has an impact on low work motivation. In this case, the implementation of a more systematic incentive policy can be a short-term solution to retain health workers. In comparison, contract workers in other health centers in Muna Regency tend to face similar challenges, as seen in the following table:

Health Facilities	Key Policies	Challenge
Waara Health Center	Flexible work schedule	Uncertainty about the status of contract workers
Lohia Health Center	Regular discussion forums	Limited supporting facilities

Health Facilities	Key Policies	Challenge
Bone Health Center	Regular skills training	Lack of health workers in the field

The table presented above shows the main policies and challenges faced by several health centers in Muna Regency. This data supports the finding that work schedule flexibility policies and discussion forums are effective strategies, although they have not been able to overcome fundamental obstacles such as staffing status or supporting facilities. These findings provide clearer guidance for future policy planning.

Honorary health workers in Muna Regency face more complex challenges. One of the cases that emerged was the loss of data on honorary health workers from the database system of the State Civil Service Agency (BKN). This not only creates anxiety among health workers, but also affects the overall stability of health services. Support in the form of certainty of employment status and a timely payroll system is a top priority in increasing their retention. This case also reflects the need to increase transparency in the management of human resource data in the health sector. Professional organizations such as the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (PAFI) play a strategic role in supporting health workers in Muna Regency. The main focus of the organization is to provide additional skills training, especially in clinical drug and pharmaceutical management. In addition, PAFI recommends increasing supporting facilities such as official housing for health workers working in remote areas. This recommendation is relevant given the need to attract health workers to areas with limited access. PAFI's role as a bridge between health workers and local governments creates a space to voice aspirations that have been neglected.

Collaboration between academics and local governments also makes a significant contribution to the development of health workforce management strategies. The Faculty of Public Health, Universitas Airlangga is involved in the preparation of the work plan of the Muna Regency Health Office, including the development of a data-based distribution strategy for health workers. The implementation of a technology-based monitoring system is one of the main recommendations to improve the efficiency of workforce management. However, the findings show that the impact of this program has not been evenly distributed across regions, especially in remote areas. This emphasizes the need for a more integrated approach to reach all levels of society.

One of the unique findings of the study is that some healthcare workers persist despite facing less supportive working conditions. Personal motivation, such as dedication to community service, is an unexpected driving factor in the retention of health workers in Muna Regency. This phenomenon shows the importance of giving appreciation to health workers who show high commitment, despite the various challenges faced. Approaches such as awarding or public recognition can be an additional strategy to improve their job satisfaction.

Discussion

This study identifies that improving work facilities, such as the procurement of adequate medical equipment at the Health Center, can increase the satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. This is in line with findings that show that adequate infrastructure plays an important role in improving the quality of health services in remote areas. However, budget limitations are often an obstacle in its implementation. Therefore, more effective budget planning and clear priorities are needed to ensure the availability of the required facilities. This approach can help address health care access gaps in remote areas

In addition, a routine training program in collaboration with the Ministry of Health is expected to be able to improve the competence of health workers in this region. This kind of training has proven to be effective in improving the quality of services and job satisfaction of health workers. However, challenges such as limited access to technology and resources in

remote areas need to be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of training programs. The right implementation of information and communication technology can be a solution to overcome this obstacle. Thus, health workers in remote areas can continue to improve their competence despite the existing limitations.

This research also highlights the importance of creating a comfortable and flexible work environment to increase job satisfaction among health workers. Approaches such as flexible work schedules and monthly discussion forums can help overcome burnout and increase work motivation. This is in line with the findings that show that a supportive work environment contributes positively to the retention of health workers. However, the uncertainty of employment status, especially for contract workers, remains a challenge that needs to be overcome immediately. Policies that provide certainty of status and fair incentives can increase the retention of health workers in remote areas.

The role of professional organizations, such as the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (PAFI), in providing special training and clinical pharmacy management education is also important in improving the competence and job satisfaction of health workers. Collaboration between professional organizations and local governments can help voice the aspirations of health workers and provide relevant policy recommendations. However, proposals such as providing additional incentives for those working in remote areas and improving supporting facilities such as official housing need to be realized immediately to increase the retention of health workers. The implementation of policies that are responsive to the needs of health workers in remote areas will have a positive impact on the quality of health services in the region.

Collaboration between academics and local governments in policy formulation involving health workers can increase a sense of belonging and job satisfaction. A data-based approach in health worker distribution planning and the implementation of technology-based monitoring and evaluation systems can improve the efficiency of health human resource management. However, the positive impact of this program has not been evenly distributed throughout the region, especially in remote areas. Therefore, more integrated and comprehensive efforts are needed to ensure that all health workers, including in remote areas, benefit from the policies implemented. Thus, the gap in access and quality of health services in Indonesia can be minimized.

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CONCLUSIONS AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This study concludes that management strategies that focus on improving work facilities, periodic training, and participation-based policy formulation have great potential to increase the satisfaction and retention of health workers in Muna Regency. In addition, a comfortable work environment, logistical support, and assurance of employment status are key elements in creating better work motivation, especially in remote areas. The results of this study show that collaboration between local governments, professional organizations, and academics is very important in formulating policies that are responsive to the needs of health workers. However, challenges such as budget constraints, lack of facilities in remote areas, and uneven distribution of health workers remain obstacles that must be overcome. These findings are expected to provide guidance for stakeholders to develop more comprehensive policies in the health sector.

Theoretically, the findings of this study enrich the literature on strategic management of human resources in the health sector, especially in the context of regions with limited access. Practically, this research provides real solutions that can be applied, such as improving work facilities and technology-based training to overcome geographical and logistical constraints. These findings also make an important contribution in supporting the formulation of policies that can improve the welfare of health workers, thereby directly contributing to improving the quality of health services. The study has limitations, such as a limited focus on one specific region and a descriptive approach that does not include quantitative analysis. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a study with a wider scope, involving other regions, and use a mixed-method approach to deepen the analysis. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding and support the development of more effective management strategies.

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