

## An Evaluation of the Factors Influencing the Performance of Registered Nurses at the National Referral Hospital in Namibia

**Soilkki Katrina Kamati**

*Graduate of the Regent Business School and a Resident of Namibia*

**Nadeem Cassim**

*Head of Institutional Research, Academic and Lecturer, Regent Business School, Durban, South Africa*  
[research2@regent.ac.za](mailto:research2@regent.ac.za)

**Anis Mahomed Karodia (PhD)**

*Professor, Senior Academic and Researcher, Regent Business School, Durban, South Africa*  
[akarodia@regent.ac.za](mailto:akarodia@regent.ac.za)

### ABSTRACT

*The performance and efficiency of health workers play an important role for the success of any healthcare system. Nurses constitute the largest human resource element in Namibia's healthcare sector, and contribute significantly to the overall healthcare of the nation. Their performance therefore, has a great impact on quality and efficiency of healthcare*

**Keywords:** *Registered Nurse, Health Worker, Performance Management, Healthcare Quality, Healthcare System, Motivation, Work Environment, Training.*

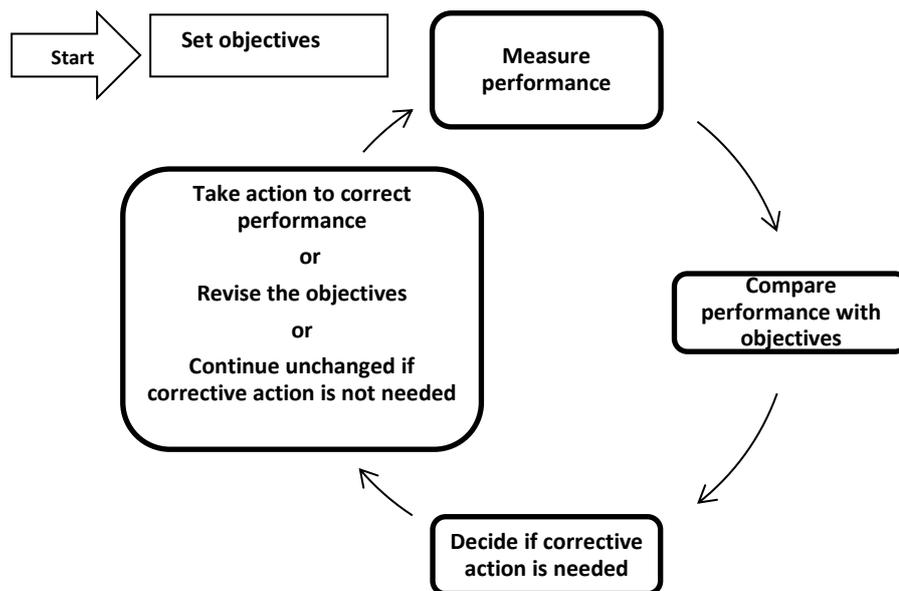
### INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing demand for qualitative health care services expands the roles of healthcare managers in the improvement of their health workers performance. The performance and efficiency of health workers (which includes nurses) plays an important role for the success of any healthcare system. This importance cannot be over emphasized because it has a direct impact on patients' safety. It is due to this, that the Namibian Government recently appointed a Commission of Inquiry to look into the activities, affairs, management, and operations of the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MOHSS), with the aim to improve the public health system. This study however, is particularly interested in the Namibian labour market milieu for nurses.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Garrard (2011:5:3) defines a literature review as an analysis of scientific material about a specific topic that requires the reviewer to carefully read each of the studies to evaluate the study's purpose. He observes that a review of related literature can provide the researcher with important facts and background information about the subject under study. This chapter provides the views of various authors regarding the important aspects of performance management. To re-iterate, this study aims to evaluate the factors that influence the performance of RNs. This chapter will contribute to the existing body of knowledge as well as identify the gaps that exist in literature regarding the topic. This chapter also discusses the concept of performance management, healthcare qualities, performance appraisal, and provides an overview of the factors that influence the performance of RNs.

The strategies for managing and improving of performance management system are discussed, as challenges that are encountered within the performance management of nurses. The basic principles of performance management are clearly outlined diagrammatically in figure 2.1 hereunder for ease of reference and are therefore self explanatory and require no further explanation.

**Figure 2.1: The Basic Principles of Performance Management**

Source: Adapted from Lewis and Henderson (2009:26).

### The Role of Managers in Employee' Performance

The delivery of efficient health services in Namibia needs proper supervision, the term defined as the critical watching and directing of activities whose components may include intervention, building relationships, monitoring, and evaluation of activities. The lack thereof leads to a loss of human lives (Mwilima, 2013:2).

The supervisors are responsible for coordinating patient treatment assigning different tasks to nurses within their department. Effective managers and supervisors realize that they must take an active and positive role in employee' performance, to ensure that goals are met (Werner and De Simone, 2009:315). The challenges facing nurse managers in the health sector today are serious and seemingly endless: insufficient health professionals, brain drain, low morale and de-motivated staff. For a nurse manager to be successful, it is essential that they have the required management skills such as technical skills, conceptual skills and human skills. A lack of the skills can lead to poor performance, lack of improvement, low profit, poor decision making, disheartening of employees, lower productivity, and may jeopardize an organization (Danna, 2013:2).

Hospital leaders should plan and implement effective strategies to promote nurse retention. This can be done through creating a work environment that is caring and conducive for the nurses' professional practice. However, Rust and De Jagger (2010:2277) reveal that there is a lack of leadership and management capacity within the public health sector. In Namibia, health workers frequently complain and express dissatisfaction with management, poor leadership, lack of support and recognition (Ipinge et al., 2009:17). It follows that, nurse managers at KISH should acquire knowledge and skills of human behaviour and be able to effectively manage both RNs and other employees in their jobs.

### Performance Management Challenges of Namibia's Healthcare

In any health system, human resources are a central component and are essential for the delivery of care to patients (Rawat, 2014:31). According to Houston (2013:92), African countries (included Namibia) have a significant shortage of RNs in terms absolute numbers and that is compounded by the fact that RNs are more likely to migrate. Health workers migrate out of the country due to poor pay and a lack of non- financial incentives. Countries' healthcare sectors argue that their human healthcare resources are being extracted at a time when they are needed most. The pool of skilled workers in Namibia is unevenly distributed, with high concentrations in urban areas, rural communities, and many working in private sector rather than in public health care. Many resign due to the pressure of poor working conditions and low pay. Others migrate to better jobs abroad, or with private sector and non-governmental organizations (Ipinge et al., 2009:22). The mass migration of skilled nurses to the private health sector and other countries is one of the important factors contributing to the human resources losses. The shortages of health professionals pose a great challenge to effective service delivery in Namibia's healthcare sector (Shopati, 2011:9).

Recruitment and retention of staff are key challenges for health policy- makers. Retention entails preventing people from leaving an organization to work elsewhere. Recruitment is necessary when there is a shortage of a specific group of nurses in the country (Muller, 2009:315). Recruiting foreign nurses to solve acute staffing shortages is simply a poorly thought- out quick fix to a much greater problem; issues that led to the shortage are never addressed (Houston, 2013:92). In Namibia, an open-ended memorandum of understanding to recruit Kenyan-registered health workers resulted in a Joint Working Group being set up in order to incorporate the WHO global code of practice on international recruitment of health personnel. Such action also has never solved the problem the staff shortage in the country (Sankwasa, 2012:2). Therefore, recruitment and retention problems should be addressed, as staff shortages or unmotivated health workforce are likely to have adverse effects on the delivery of health services and outcome of care. The next challenge concerns leadership and management commitment.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Target Population**

The population refers to the group under study. This is the group for whom the study findings can be generalized (Keele, 2011:4). The researcher identified Registered Nurses who were working at the referral and training hospital (KISH). According to the Hospital monthly change list of December 2012, the total population of RNs at KISH was estimated at 284. Table 3.2 shows the questionnaire response rate.

**Table 3.2: Questionnaire Response Rate**

Details	Number of Questionnaires	Percentage Represented
Questionnaires sent	50	100%
Returned	48	96%
Not returned	2	4%

According to Babbie (2010:272), the overall response rate is one guide to the representativeness of the sample respondents. A high respondent rate of 96% was achieved in this study, indicating that there is less chance of significant non-response bias (Babbie, 2010:272).

**Limitations of the research**

Limitations are those elements over which the researcher has no control (Dusick, 2011:5). This study was limited to evaluate the factors that influence the performance of RNs in the hospital. Considering resources and time constraints, the research was limited to one hospital in Windhoek. Therefore, it cannot be representative of the whole nurses’ population in the country. The other limitations experienced during the research were the limited resources in nursing; some of the resources consulted are old and did not contain the most relevant up-to-date information. Delimitations are those elements the researcher can control (Dusick, 2011:5). Participation in this study is delimited only to RNs who are permanently employed at KISH, and not to RNs from other hospitals.

**RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

Question 1 aimed to establish the age group of the respondent.

**Figure 4.1: Age**

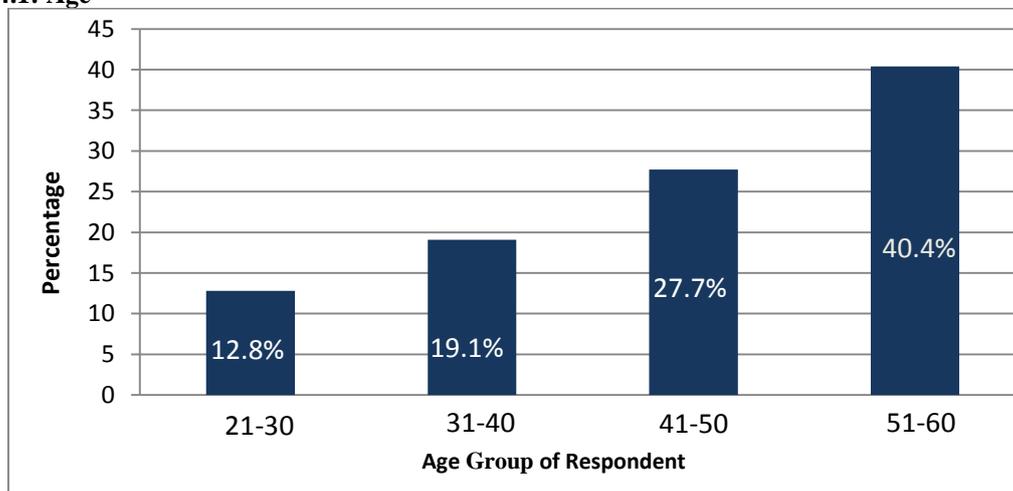


Figure 4.1, above, shows that the majority of the RNs at KISH (40%) are between 51 and 60 years of age. Though these nurses bring vast experience from their years of service, it may be possible that old age can be limiting the extent to which they execute their duties. This age group may also find it difficult to deal with heavy workloads which are typical in their work environments hence compromising performance.

**Gender of the Respondent**

**Figure 4. 2: Gender**

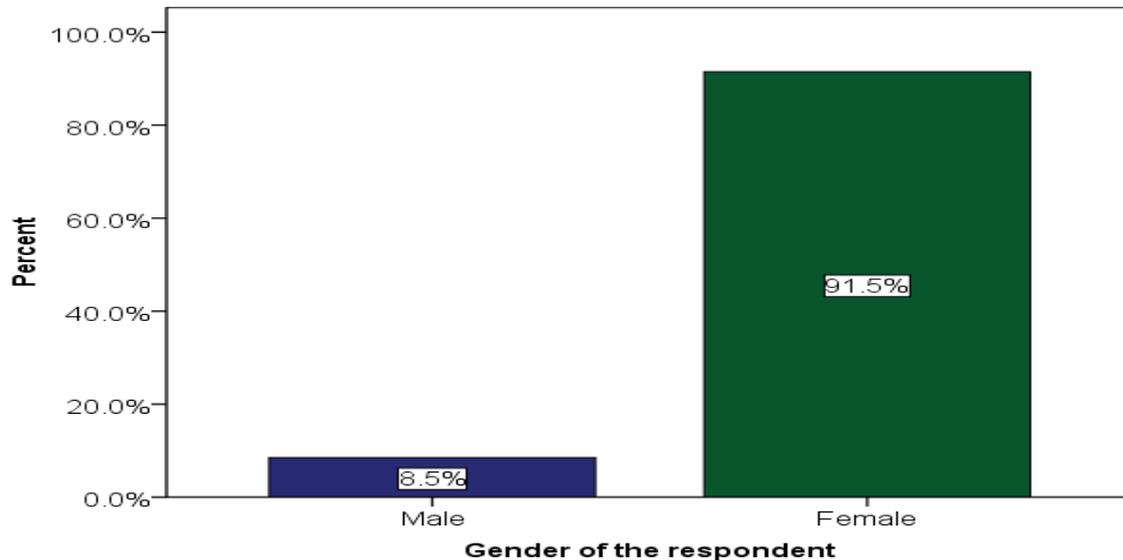
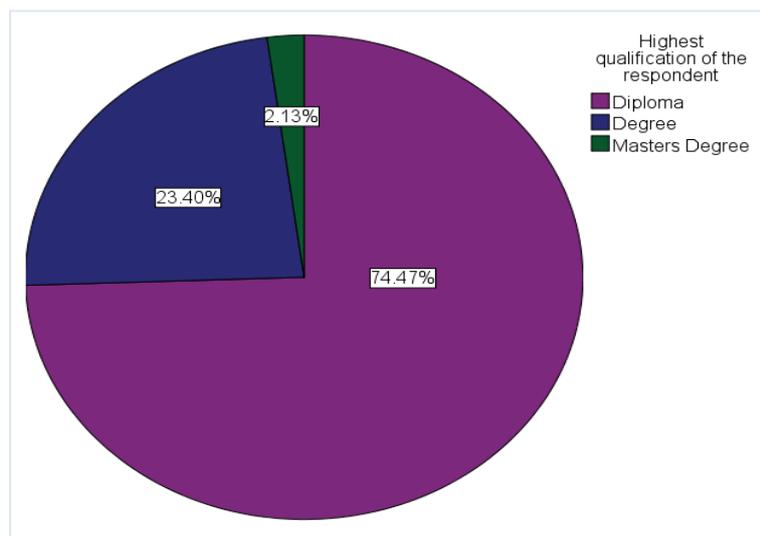


Figure 4.2 shows that only 8% of the respondents are male and 92% of the RNs at KISH are female, indicating that nursing is a profession dominated by females. This correlates with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare which indicates that women constitute 51 percent of the population in Namibia, and women predominate in care-related work such as domestic work, nursing and teaching (Nandi-Ndeitwa, 2008:2).

**Highest Educational Qualification of the Respondent**

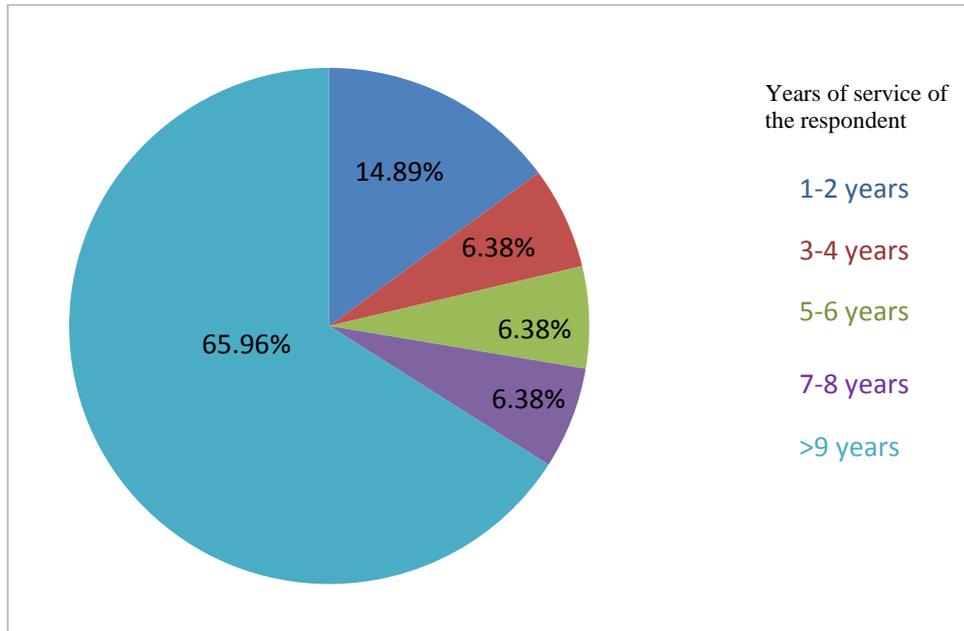
**Figure 4. 3: Educational Qualification**



The pie chart above shows that about 75% of the RNs are holders of nursing diplomas, 23% are holders of degrees, and only 2% are holders of masters’ degrees. This could be an indication that nurses at KISH do not see the incentive of furthering their education because it does not bring back substantial rewards. It is therefore necessary to develop necessary policies which encourage nurses to further their studies thereby improving the skills of the RNs.

**Years of Service of the Respondent**

**Figure 4.4: Years of Service**



The pie chart above shows that 66% of the RNs have more than 9 years of experience, a collective 19% of the respondents have been working in the institution between 3-8 years, and 15 % of the nurses have worked for more than 1-2 years. This is correlating with the results of the study in figure 4.1 reveal that most of the nurses are between 51 and 60 years of age. This indicates that the KISH has an experienced workforce.

**FACTORS THAT AFFECTING RESPONDENT’S PERFORMANCE**

**Lack of Training as a Contributor to Poor Performance**

**Figure 4.5: Lack of Training**

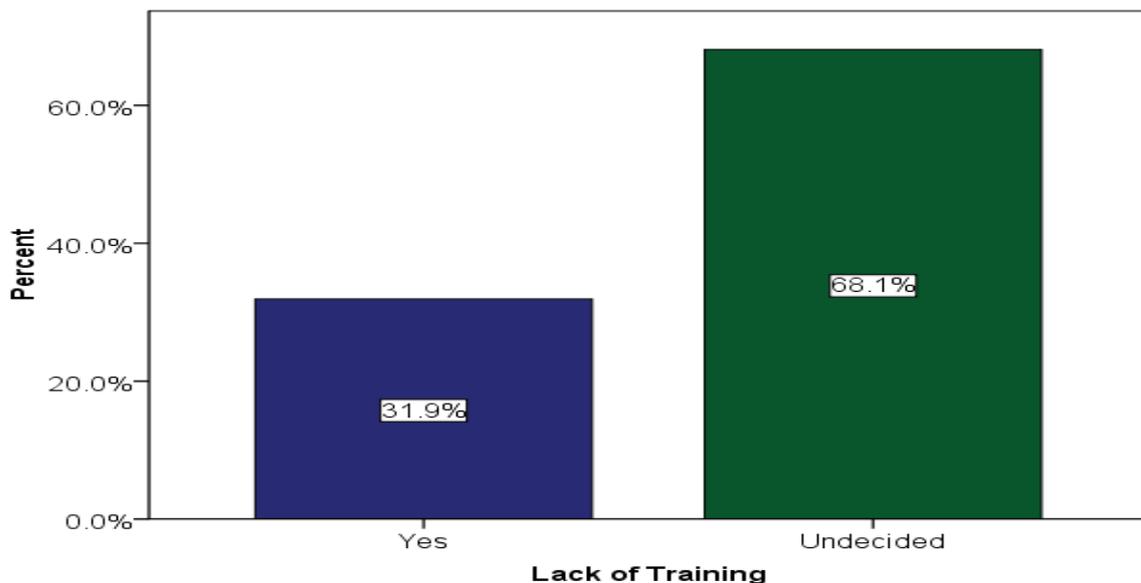
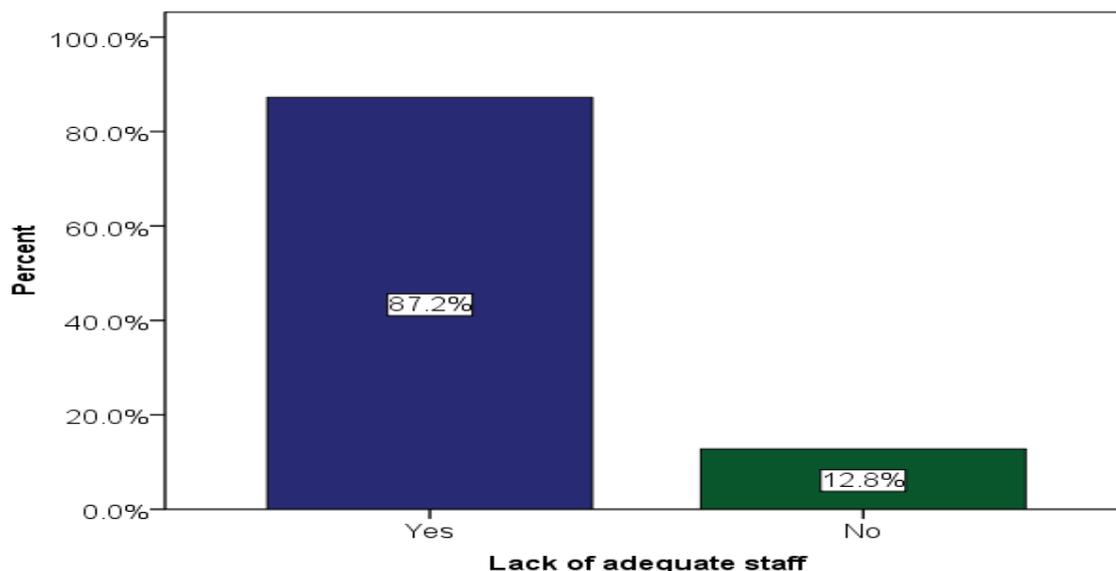


Figure 4.5 shows that 32% of the respondents cited lack of training as a contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses at KISH. A large proportion of 68% of respondents indicated undecided towards lack of training as a contributor to poor performance. No respondent could confirm that he/ she is adequately trained to perform his/ her duties by citing that lack of training was not a contributing factor to poor performance.

**Inadequate Staff as a Contributing Factor to the Poor Performance of Nurses**

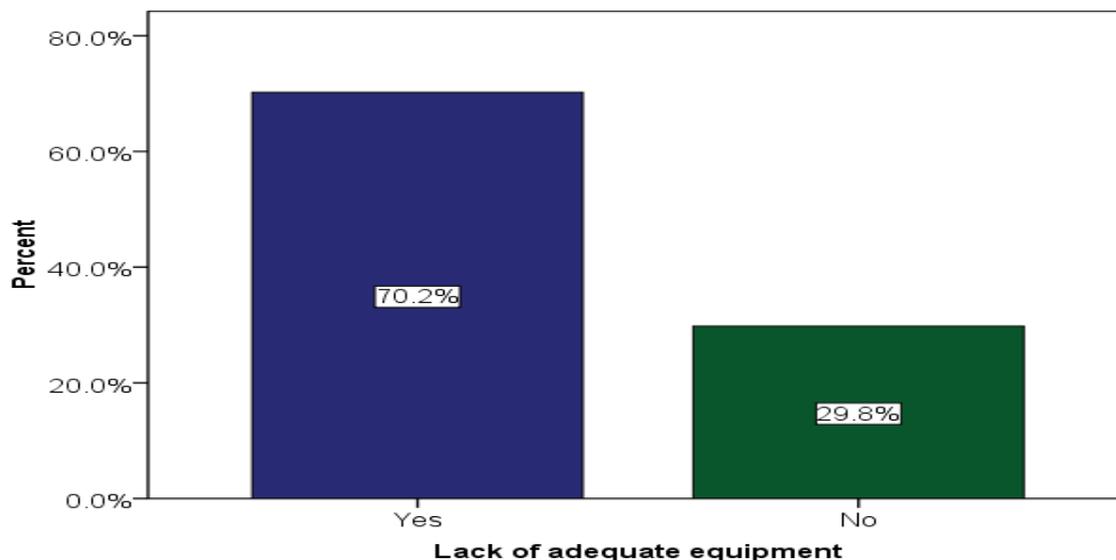
**Figure 4.6: Inadequate Staff**



The bar chart above shows that at least 87% of the RNs cited that a shortage of staff is a factor that negatively affects or contributes to poor performance. Only 13% of respondents disagreed that shortage of staff contributes to poor performance. This is a strong indication that the hospital is understaffed and the effects are an increased workload on the available workforce. Research shows that a heavy nursing workload adversely affects patient safety. The most commonly used unit-level workload is the nurse-to-patient ratio (Carayon and Gurses, 2008:97). Nurse-to-patient ratio should be 1:1 or 1:2 in intensive care unit, and 1:5 in the general hospital ward (Kaissie, 2010:5).

**Inadequate Equipment as a Contributing Factor to the Poor Performance of Nurses**

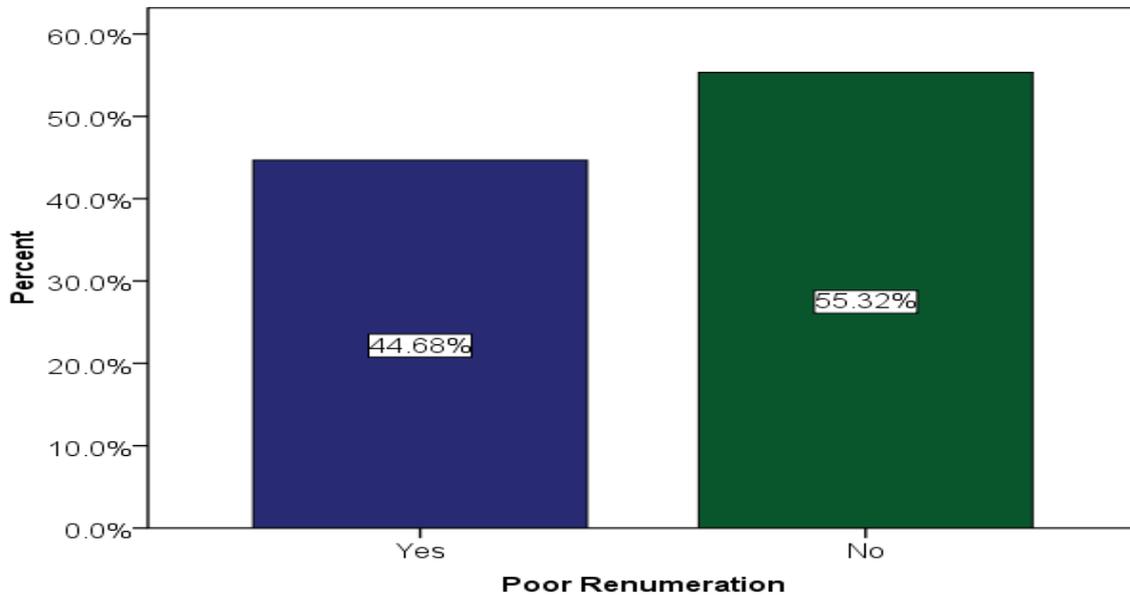
**Figure 4.7: Inadequate Equipment**



More than 70% of the RNs cited that the hospital does not have adequate equipment and resources that enable them to efficiently execute their duties. A small proportion of RNs (30%) indicated that inadequate equipment is not a contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses. Some of the respondents interviewed highlighted that medical supplies are not always delivered on time; hence patients may have to wait for the supplied before they could be attended to.

**Poor Remuneration as a Contributing Factor to the Poor Performance of Nurses**

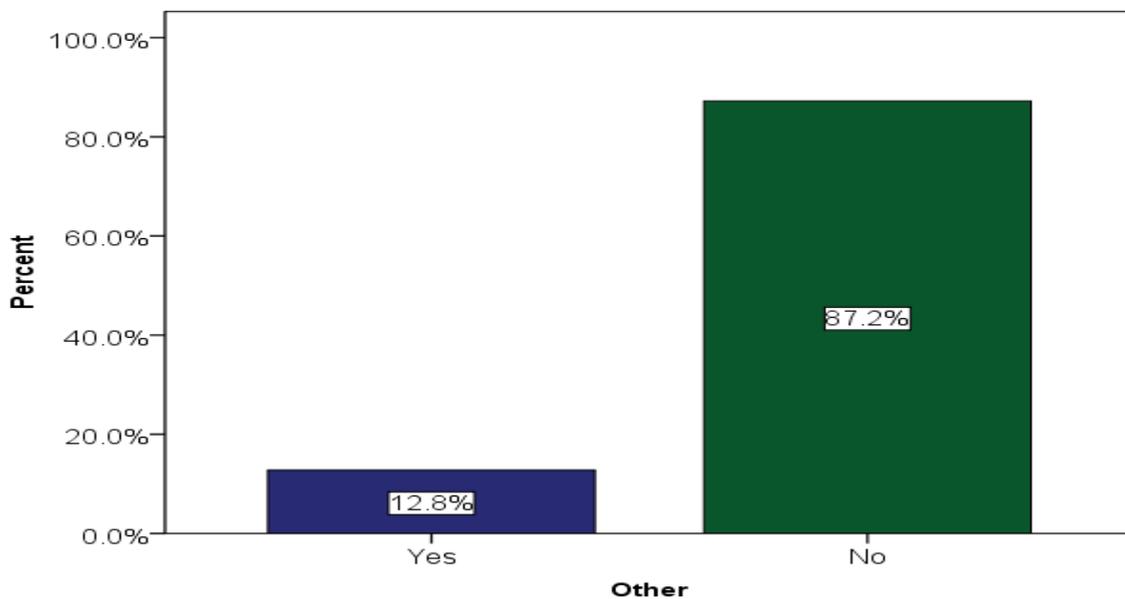
**Figure 4.8: Poor Remuneration**



A small proportion of 45% indicated that that poor remuneration is a contributing factor to their poor performance. The majority of respondents support the view of Ipinge et al. (2009:17) state that health workers do not only seek financial incentives, most nurses' look beyond salary increments: personal development, better housing, education for children and specialization in different fields in healthcare.

**Other Reasons which may contribute to the Poor Performance of Nurses**

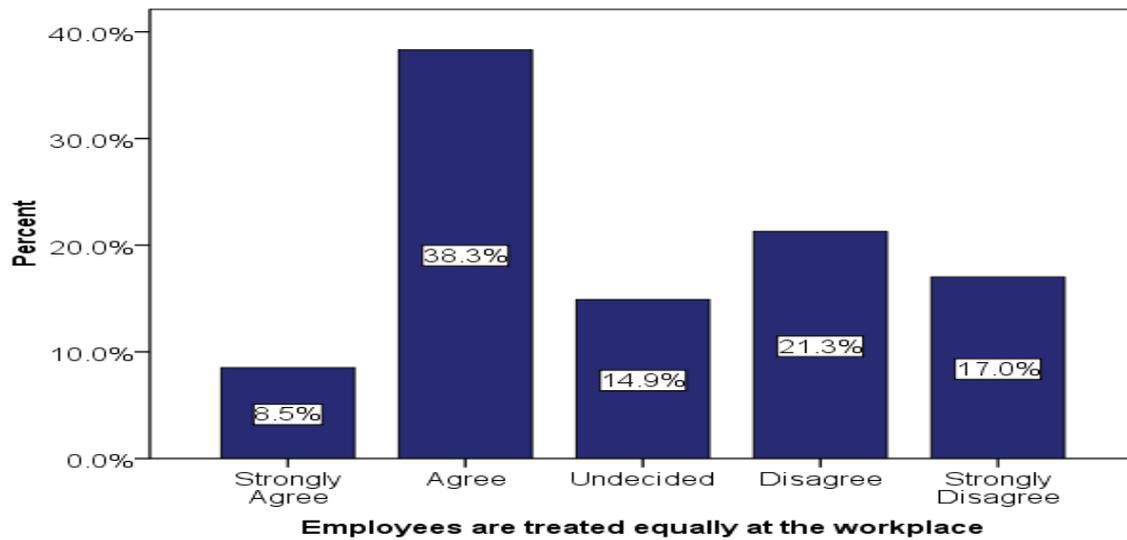
**Figure 4.9: Other Reasons**



A larger proportion of about 87% disagreed with other reasons as a contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses. It can be assumed that RNs work in different disciplines, environments and workplaces. Approximately 13% of the respondents cited other reasons as a contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses at KISH.

**Treatment of Employees at the Workplace**

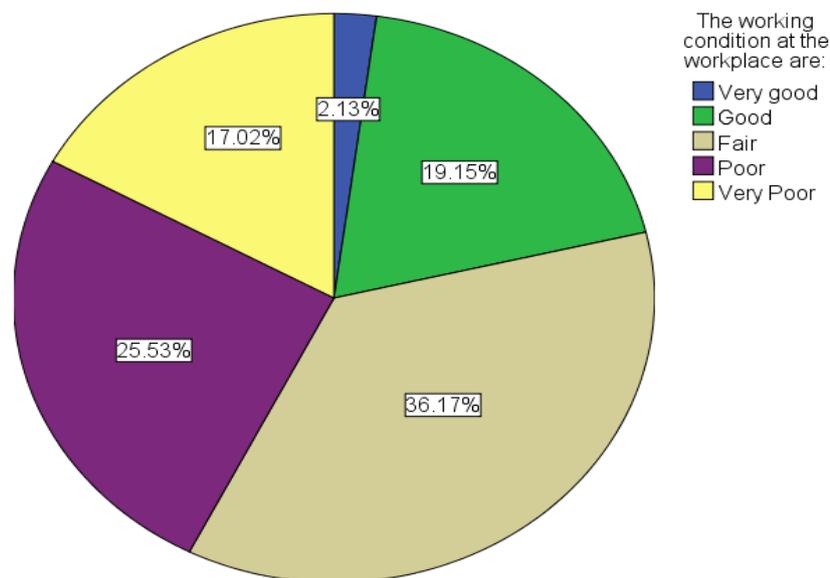
**Figure 4.10: Treatment of Employees**



The majority of the respondents (47%) highlighted that employees are treated fairly at the workplace while a considerably large proportion of 38 % felt employees were not treated equally at the hospital, and 15% of the nurses are undecided. This indicates that there are some isolated cases of preferential treatment of employees which are not worrying but may lead to poor performance of the disadvantaged nurses if they are left unresolved. According to Henry Fayol’s management principles, equal treatment of employees is important in fostering the spirit of oneness in an organization (Jones and George, 2009:53).

**Registered Nurses’ Assessment of their Work Environment**

**Figure 4.11: Registered Nurses’ Assessment**



The pie chart above shows that the majority of the RNs (36%) rated the working conditions at KISH as fair, while considerably large proportions of 26% and 17% rated the working conditions as poor and very poor. Only a small proportion of 21% are very satisfied with the working environment they work in. This indicates that there is a possibility of improving the performance of nurses through improving the working conditions of nurses given a large proportion of nurses who are not very satisfied with the conditions they work in.

**Management’s Efforts to Improve the Work Environment of Nurses**

**Figure 4.12: Management’s Efforts**

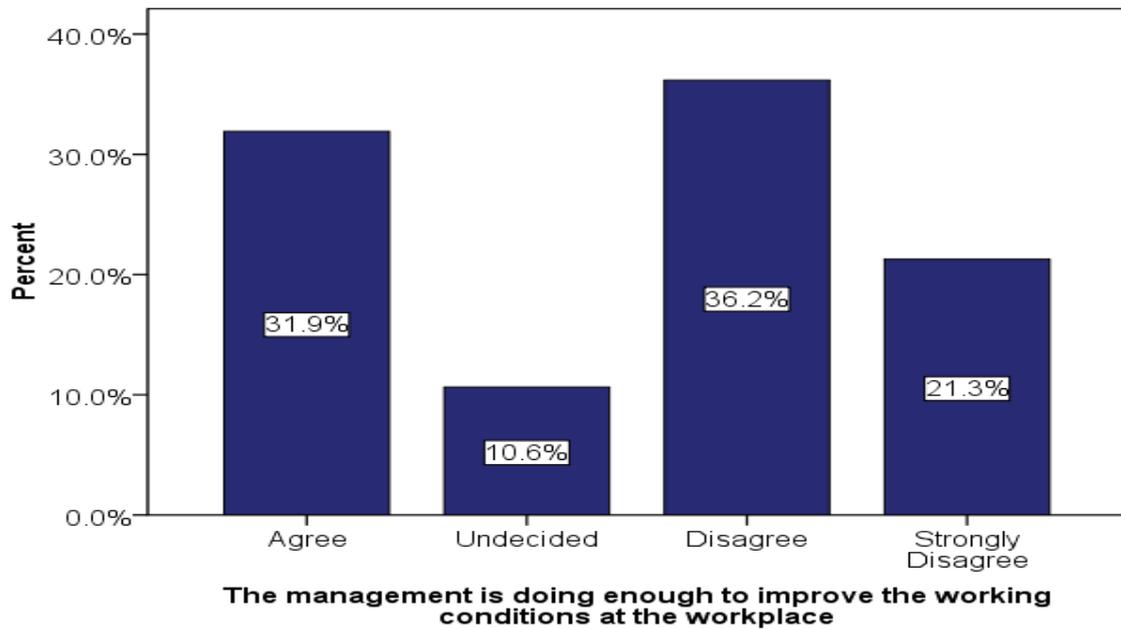
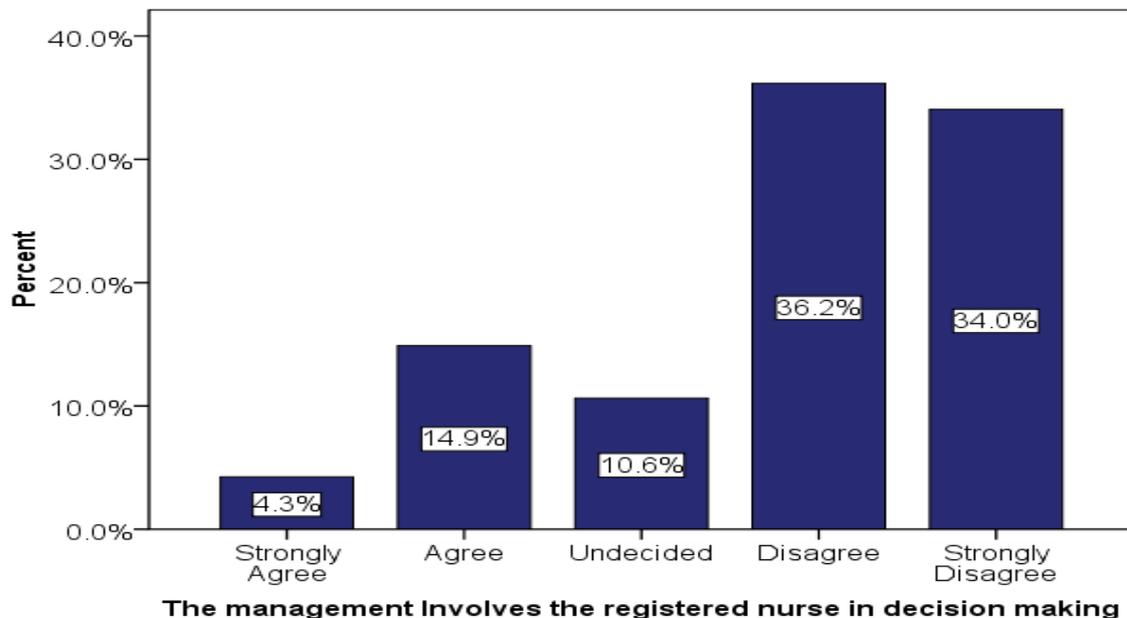


Figure 4.12 above shows that the majority of nurses (36% disagree and 21% strongly disagree) felt that the management is not doing enough to improve the working conditions at the workplace. However, a relatively large proportion, 32%, felt that the management has done enough to improve the working conditions, and 11% are undecided.

**Nurses’ Involvement in Decision Making**

**Figure 4.13: Nurses’ Involvement in Decision Making**



The figure above shows that management does not involve nurses when making decisions as evidenced by a total of 70% of the nurses sharing this opinion. A collective 19% of respondents agreed that management involves nurses in decision making, 11% of the respondents are undecided.

**The Motivation Level of Nurses at KISH**

**Figure 4.14: The motivation level**

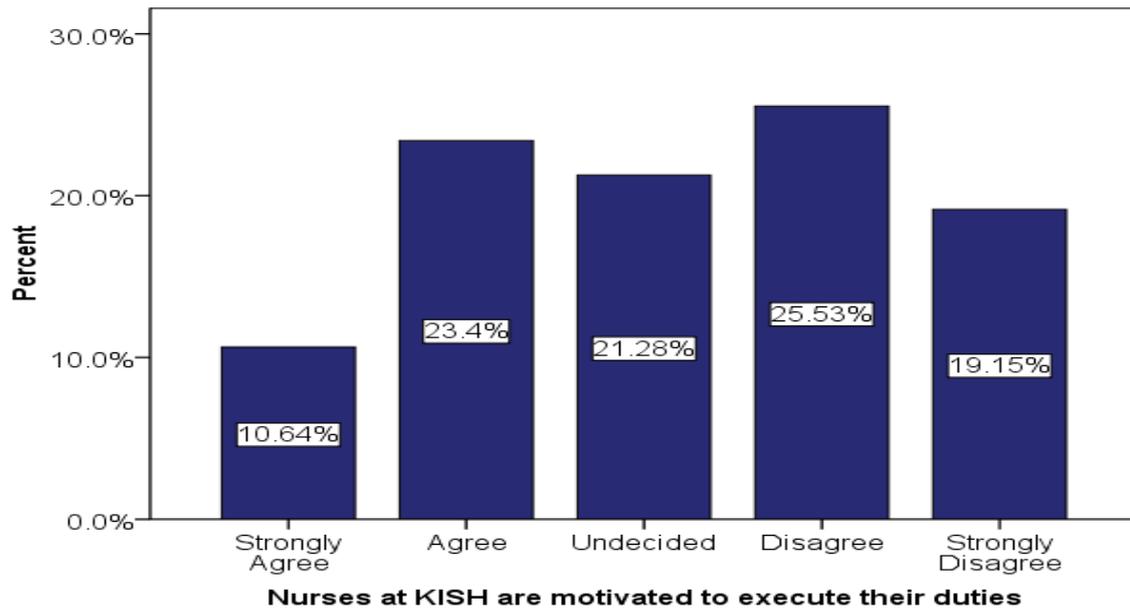
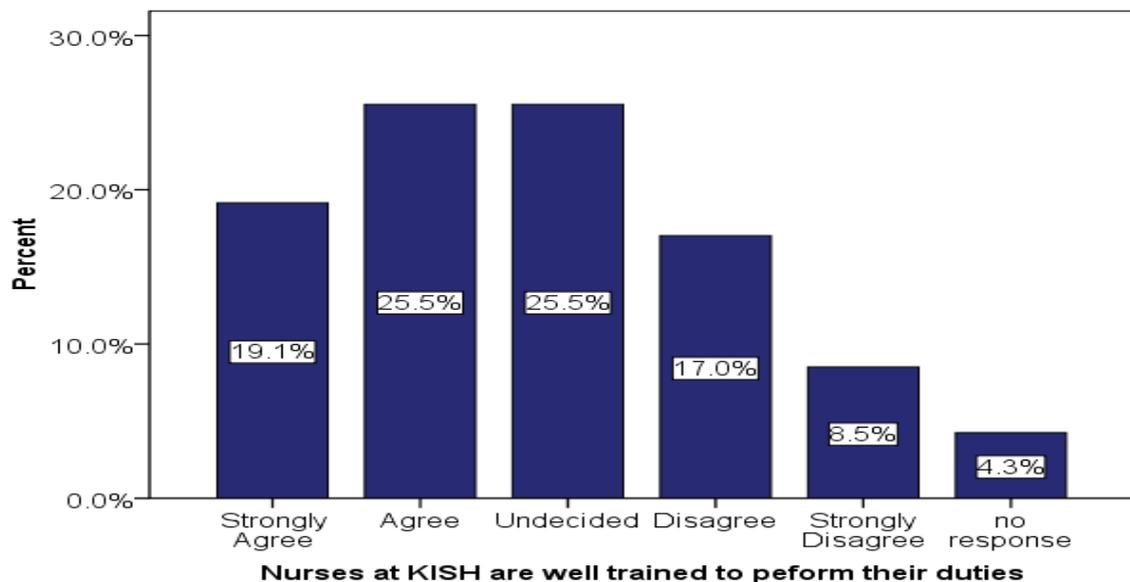


Figure 4.14 shows that the majority of nurses (26% disagreed and 19% strongly disagreed) at KISH are not motivated to execute their duties. The motivation levels are however not very low as evidenced by the 34% proportion who stated that nurses are motivated to execute their duties. Twenty one percent of respondents are undecided.

**Are Nurses at KISH well trained to perform their Duties?**

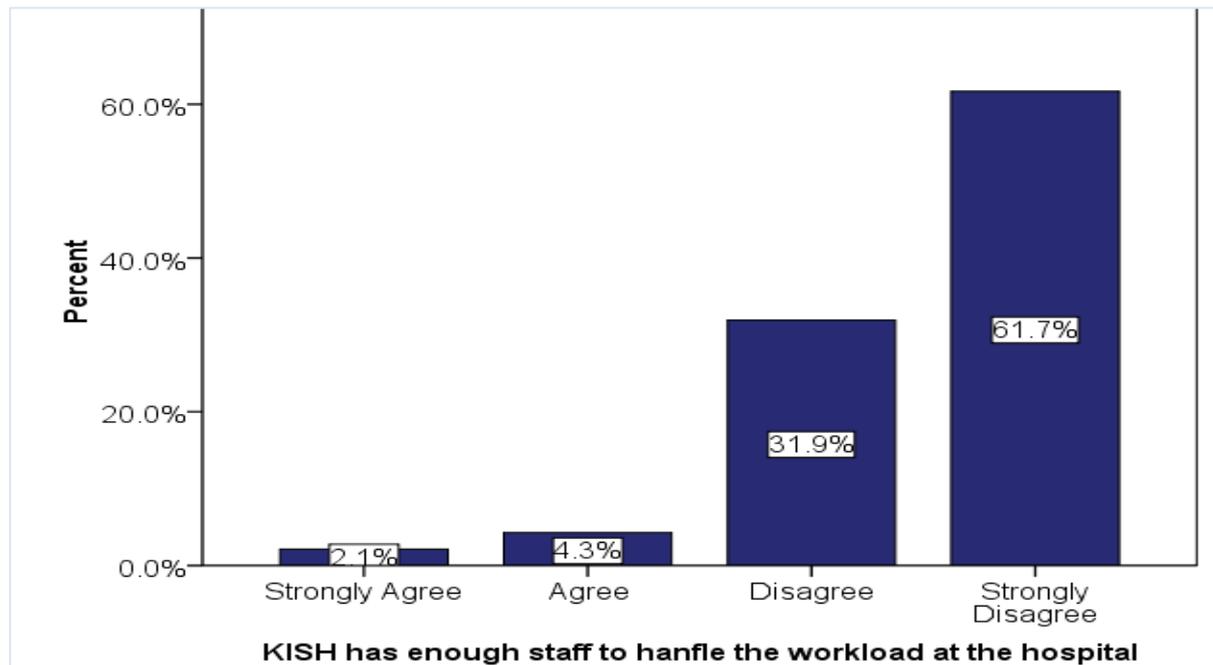
**Figure 4.15: Training Levels of Nurses**



The majority of nurses (19% strongly agreed and 26% agreed) believed that nurses are well trained to execute their duties appropriately. A large proportion (26% undecided) could not establish whether or not the nurses at KISH are well trained to execute their duties, showing a degree of doubt in the skills possessed by fellow nurses. A collective 25% of respondents disagreed that nurses are well trained to perform their duties appropriately.

**Availability of Enough Staff to Handle the Hospital Workload**

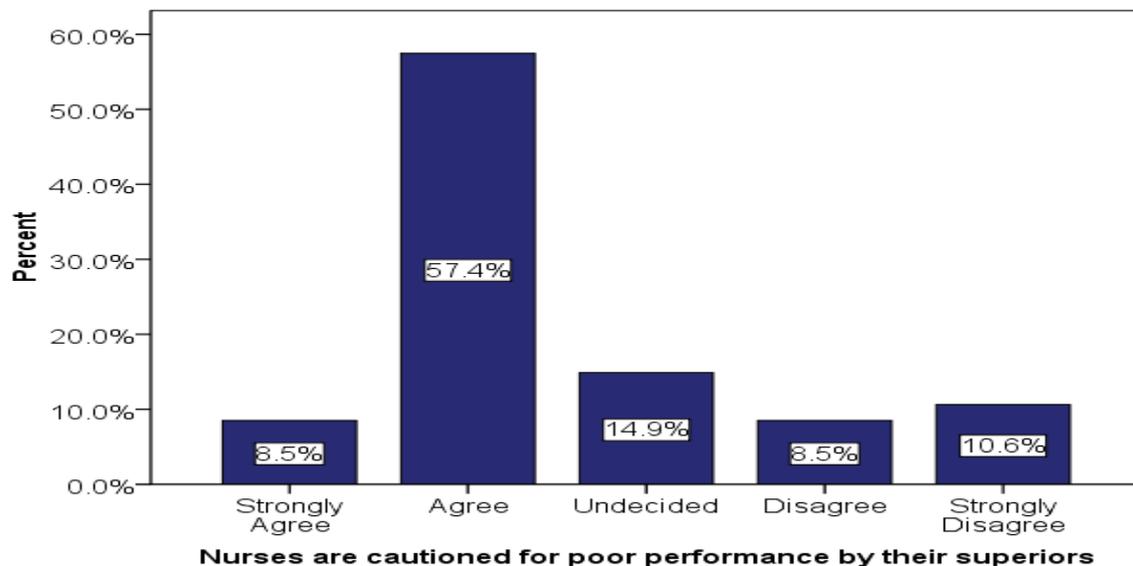
**Figure 4.16: Availability of Enough Staff**



The results above strongly suggest that KISH is facing serious challenges in ensuring that available workers are enough to cater for the hospital workload as evidenced by a total of 94% of the respondents who indicate that the hospital does not have enough staff to meet the needs of patients. This will also increase the workload on the available nurses thereby straining them.

**Are Nurses Cautioned by their Superiors for Poor Performance?**

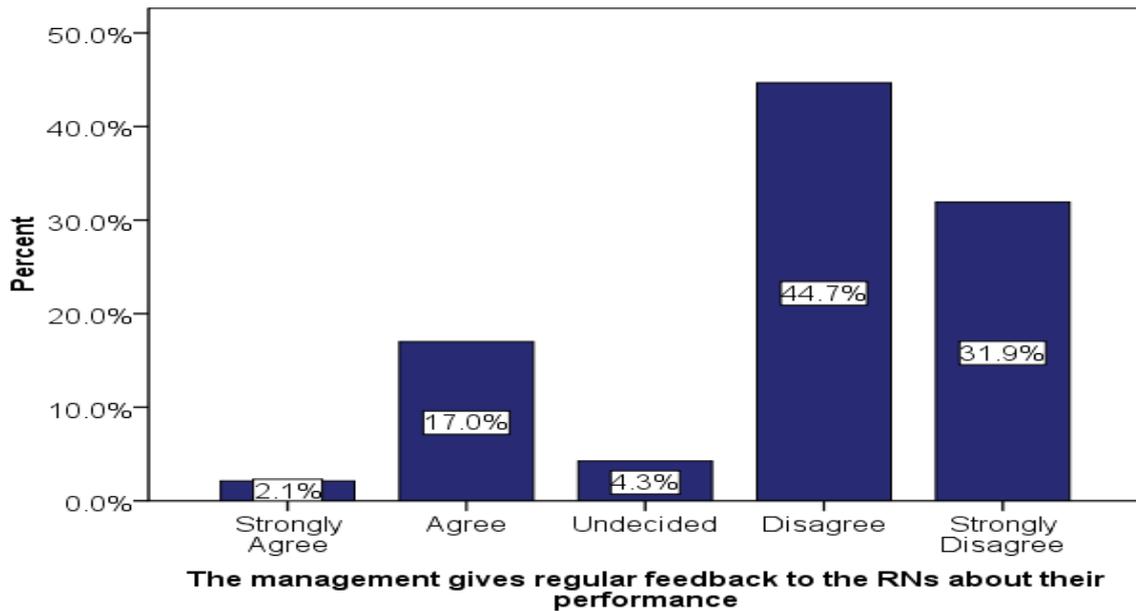
**Figure 4.17: Are Nurses Cautioned by their Superiors?**



The results above (66% of the respondents), strongly suggest that the supervisors at KISH are cautioning nurses whenever they perform poorly. A collective 18% of RNs disagreed that nurses are cautioned for poor performance, while 16% of the respondents are undecided. This is important in ensuring that nurses are aware of their performance is under scrutiny; hence it leaves little room for poor performance.

**Does the Management give Feedback to the RNs about their Performance?**

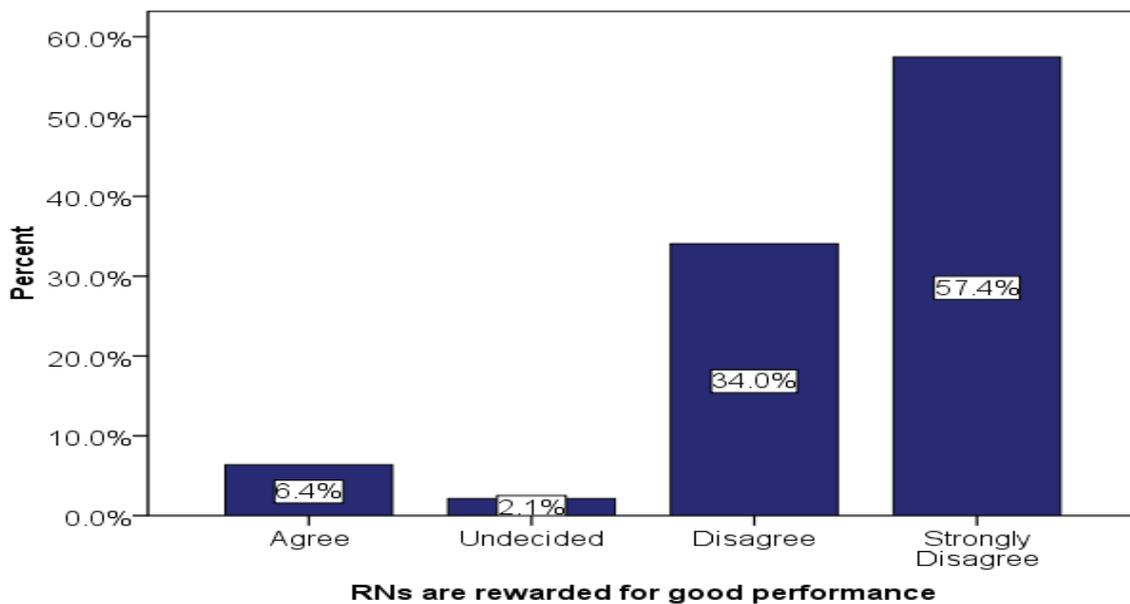
**Figure 4.18: Management Feedback**



The majority of the respondents (77% disagreed) highlighted that management does not provide feedback to the RNs about their performance, 19% agreed and 4% undecided. This shows that there is weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the hospitals which may lead to nurses performing poorly and such cases might remain unnoticed. One of the core skills required of a supervisor is to provide effective feedback, and ensures that supervisees receive feedback timeously on their performance and general aspects concerning their job (Booyens, 2008:245).

**Are Nurses Rewarded for good Performance?**

**Figure 4.19: Nurses Reward**



The results in Figure 4.19 shows that 6% of the nurses agreed that RNs are rewarded for good performance and 2% are undecided. Most respondents indicated that there are no rewards for good performance at the hospital as shown by a total of 92% of the respondents sharing this opinion.

## Key Informant Interview

Supervisors are of the opinion that basic training is not sufficient for the nurses to effectively execute their duties. As a result, there should be post basic training to ensure that the nurses are highly skilled. The informants pointed out lower motivation levels being among the major causes of poor performance because nurses are not rewarded for performing well. This is consistent with the findings from the self-administered questionnaires. The supervisors indicated that the hospital lacks adequate experienced staff to effectively deal with the hospital workload, which ultimately impacts on nurses' performance.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Findings from the Study

Findings from the research study are discussed under the findings from the literature review and from the primary research.

### Findings from the Literature Review

The review of the literature was performed in order to determine factors that influence the performance of RNs in the hospital. A summary of the key findings are discussed below:

#### Work Environment

The improvement of the work environment for nurses is important thus enhancing services delivery. Work place health promotion is a combined effort of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work (Chan, 2013:2).

#### Training and Competencies

Training facilitates employees' learning of job-related competencies such as knowledge, skills, and behaviours that are critical for successful job performance (Noe et al., 2010:273). Insufficient training could contribute to the under-performance of employees, anxieties, lack of confidence and job-related stress (Weinberg, Sutherland and Cooper, 2010:197).

#### Shortages of Staff

The public healthcare sector in Namibia is facing challenges regarding access to human resources. Nurses represent the largest clinical group in Namibia's healthcare sector and contribute significantly to the overall healthcare of the nation. The shortage of nurses continuously threatens the provision of quality healthcare in Namibian healthcare facilities.

#### Motivation

Motivation refers to psychological forces that determine the direction of a person's behaviour in an organization, a person's level of effort and a person's level of persistence (Jones and George, 2009:464). The low level of health worker motivation has been identified as a central problem in health service deliver. Low motivation has a negative impact on the performance of individual health workers, facilities and the health system as a whole (Mathauer and Imhoff, 2006:1). Moreover, it adds to the push factors that result in the migration of health workers out of the country

#### The Role of Managers in Employee' Performance

Healthcare systems demand that nurse managers possess the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to manage and lead nursing services. The lack of skills can lead to poor performance, lack of improvement, low profit, decisions making, disheartening of employees, lower productivity, and jeopardize an organization (Danna, 2013:2).

### Findings from the Primary Research

Key findings from the study are presented below. Findings are as follows:

#### Profile of Respondents

- Findings indicate that the majority of RNs at KISH (40%) are aged between 50-60 years, which is a cause for concern, as this indicates that the MoHSS is unable to attract more young nurses in the profession (i.e. new recruits)
- The study discovered that 92 % of respondents are female and 8% of the respondents are male, indicating that nursing is a profession dominated by females. It is therefore important that MoHSS management considers gender balance in nursing profession.

- The majority of the respondents (75%) had diplomas which is the minimum qualification for the nursing profession. The supervisors interviewed for this study said that this is a major contributing factor to poor performance because the knowledge possessed by these nurses is not adequate for them to execute their duties effectively.

#### **Factors that Affecting Respondent's Performance**

- The research reveals that the major contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses is a shortage of staff. Collectively, 87% of the RNs responded that shortage of staff is a factor that negatively affects or contributes to poor performance. Furthermore, the study shows that KISH is facing serious challenges in ensuring that the available workers are enough to cater for the hospital workload as evidenced by a total of 93% of the respondents, indicate that the hospital does not have enough staff to meet the needs of patients.
- That management does not involve nurses in decisions making, which is a cause for concern for management and the functioning of nurses. In addition, hospital staff indicated that they experienced communication problems. A total of 77% of respondents highlighted that management does not provide regular feedback on the performance of nurses. It can be concluded that there are poor communication channels and performance management practices at KISH.
- Forty five percent of the respondents agreed that poor remuneration is a contributing factor to their poor performance. On the other hand, fifty five percent of the respondents were of the opinion that poor remuneration was not connected to poor performance.
- Findings reveal that 32% of respondents cited the lack of training as a contributing factor to the poor performance of nurses at KISH, while a large proportion of 68% remained undecided. Evidence from key informant interviews shows that the majority of the nurses possess the minimum qualifications for the nursing profession.
- Additionally, the key informant interview showed that factors such as lack of motivation, having to deal with frustrated patients, long working hours, and lack of appreciation from superiors are among the factors that affect their performance, which indicates that nurses are de-motivated and frustrated precisely because they are unable to satisfy their personal and professional needs.
- The majority of the respondents agreed that employees are treated fairly at the workplace while a considerably large proportion of employees were not treated equally at the hospital.
- Approximately 36% percent of the respondents indicated that the management is not doing enough to improve the working conditions at the workplace. However, relative large proportions of 26% and 17% rated working conditions as poor and very poor.
- It is important to note that motivation levels are not very satisfactory as evidenced by the 34% proportion who stated that nurses are motivated to execute their duties. The level of motivation can be increased by improving the working conditions of workers. The majority of workers at KISH rated working conditions as poor.
- The supervisors and RNs interviewed indicated that in-service training and attending of workshops are the most used technique aimed at improving the performance of nurses. However, most of the respondents interviewed highlighted that the effectiveness of in-service training is greatly affected by shortage of staff because nurses cannot leave wards unattended so that they attend training. The nurses will not benefit from training programs as a result of the situation.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings above, it can be concluded that the major cause of poor performance of nurses at KISH is the inadequate workforce. The available nurses at KISH have to carry a huge workload which is above the optimal levels. The literature revealed that the ideal nurse to patient ratio is 1: 5 but a nurse at KISH may have to attend 20-30 patients. The nurses revealed that the nurse to patient ratio at KISH is far from optimal hence this negatively affects nurses' performance because the chance of nurses making medical errors increase due to fatigue. Another major contributing factor was found to be the lack of adequate equipment at the hospital. This is also escalated by delays in the delivery of medical supplies resulting in nurses having to attend to many frustrated patients at once. Nurses highlighted that it is difficult to manage these patients, and, as a result, communication problems would occasionally arise.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that KISH hires more RNs to solve the staffing challenges at the hospital. This can be achieved through offering internship opportunities to student enrolled for nursing courses at various tertiary

institutions. Furthermore, it is recommended that the hospital engages the government and corporate companies for assistance in the acquisition of new equipment to address the challenge of equipment shortage.

Finally, it is recommended that management should set up a performance management system which consists of performance reviews and regular feedback. This system can be used to reward performers and to identify poorly performing nurses and take corrective measures. In addition, it is recommended that nurses should be involved in decision making processes at the hospital.

## AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

To effectively address performance challenges in the health sector, it is very important to research the impact of communication in the health sector. This is important because poor communication has resulted in the loss of many lives in Namibian hospitals. It is therefore important to assess whether the RNs have the required communication skills which are critical to their performance.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to evaluate the factors that influenced the performance of RNs at KISH in Namibia. Nurses constitute the largest personnel component in the hospital and spend more time with patients/clients than any other healthcare worker. The study has contributed to the knowledge of the researcher, especially regarding the factors that influence the performance of nurses.

The study followed quantitative and qualitative research methods. Explorative research design was used to analyze and describe the identified variables. Questionnaires and key informant interviews were used as the research instruments for this study. The study revealed that the KISH currently has deficiencies in human resource management. Other factors that influence the performance of RNs include inadequate materials and resources, poor working conditions and remuneration, insufficient training, low motivation, lack of involvement and feedback

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