The Experience of Female Nurses Working in the Emergency Room in Balancing Their Personal Lives With Their Work: A Phenomenological Study

Naia Prita Laora[1], Suryani Suryani[2], Dedy Suprayogi[3]

[123]Fakultas Psikologi dan Kesehatan, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

napritaa@gmail.com

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Abstract: The nursing profession is inherently demanding, characterized by irregular working hours, high workload, and substantial responsibility, all of which can significantly impact nurses' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Female nurses working in emergency rooms face unique challenges due to the high-pressure nature of the work environment and their dual roles as healthcare providers and mothers. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of female ER nurses in managing and balancing their professional and personal responsibilities using a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three nurses who have children under the age of 10, selected via purposive sampling. Thematic analysis revealed that the primary challenges include unpredictable work schedules, heavy workload, and emotional strain, which often result in fatigue and reduced quality time with family. Nevertheless, participants employed various coping strategies such as task prioritization, seeking social support, and implementing self-management techniques to effectively navigate these challenges. The findings underscore the importance of flexible work arrangements and supportive organizational environments in enhancing nurses' work-life balance, thereby improving their overall well-being and professional performance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Medical personnel are professionals who focus on providing health services to the community and play a role in caring for patients, both in emergency situations and long-term care (Rokom, 2023). One of the professions that plays an important role in the medical world is nursing. According to the WHO (2020), there are approximately 28 million nurses with formal and non-formal education (Schlein, 2021). According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2023), the number of nurses in Indonesia is recorded at 582,023, with the majority being women (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). Of the total number of nurses in Indonesia, 68.3% are non-Ners nurses (314,801 people), 18.4% are Ners nurses (85,108 people), while the remaining 13.3% are nurses with master's degrees in nursing, nursing specialists, and doctors of nursing (Rulino, 2021).

When carrying out their duties, nurses often face stressful situations. They treat patients with various conditions, compile and deliver patient reports, and deal with other situations (Alam et al., 2021). In addition, nurses often struggle with unpredictable work schedules, which makes it challenging for them to maintain a balance between work and personal life (Aminulloh & Tualeka, 2024). The workload of nurses can affect their emotions, thoughts, and physical condition, which in turn can potentially cause stress at work (Ekawarna, 2021). As workers and homemakers, it is important for nurses to have time management skills in order to fulfill all their responsibilities (Hastuti & Wahyu Utami, 2022).

According to Greenhaus et al., (2003), work-life balance is defined as the optimal level of satisfaction and function between a person's work and personal life (Greenhaus et al., 2003). According to Shobitha Poulose & Sudarsan (2014) there are several factors that influence work-life balance, namely individual, organizational, social, and other factors (Shobitha Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014; Jufrizen & Azrina Utami Nasution, 2024). Frone (2003) argues that well-being between life and work is achieved when there is no conflict between the two, so that both can be carried out well. In addition, satisfaction in one's career and personal life can also be achieved without sacrificing either one. According to Fisher et al., (2009) work-life balance consists of four dimensions, namely Work Interference With Personal Life (WIPL), which shows the extent to which work interferes with personal life; Personal Life Interference With Work (PLIW), which describes the influence of personal life on work; Personal Life Enhancement Of Work (PLEW), which emphasizes the positive contribution of personal life to performance, and Work Enhancement Of Personal Life (WEPL), which reflects the positive impact of work on quality of life.

Saputra (2022) found in his research that nurses can manage their time between work at the hospital and their role as housewives well. Their involvement in work affects their performance, and the application of work-life balance makes nurses feel satisfied with their achievements (Saputra, 2022). Another study conducted by Kang et al., (2024) shows that heavy workloads and high work stress affect nurses' work-life balance. Family and social support play an important role in maintaining this balance. Other factors such as hospital characteristics, overtime, and the physical and psychological conditions of nurses also affect their performance (Kang et al., 2024). High work demands can create difficult situations for individuals, requiring efforts to balance their lives (Rahmi, 2022).

Excessive work pressure can lead to fatigue, anxiety, and decreased productivity. Meanwhile, maintaining work-life balance can improve well-being, reduce stress, and improve the quality of personal and professional relationships (Cintantya & Nurtjahjanti, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to determine the description of work-life balance among mothers who work as nurses and analyze the challenges and strategies they apply to maintain a balance between their roles as nurses and mothers.

2 METHOD

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of nurses who simultaneously take on the role of housewives. This design was chosen to explore the subjective meanings, interpretations, and feelings of the participants regarding the balance between work and personal life (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

The participants in this study were three nurses who also carried out the role of housewives. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique with specific inclusion criteria, namely: (1) working as emergency room (ER) nurses, and (2) having children under the age of 10. These criteria were determined to ensure that participants experienced dual responsibilities as healthcare professionals in a high-pressure environment and as mothers with significant parenting duties.

Data collection strategy

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured format. This method enabled the researcher to explore participants' personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings while still allowing flexibility for probing deeper into relevant topics. The interviews were conducted in a setting comfortable for the participants, recorded with their consent, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis used a thematic analysis approach. The process began with transcribing the interview recordings, followed by repeated reading to gain familiarity with the content. The researcher then generated initial codes from significant statements and grouped them into broader themes. These themes were refined and interpreted to reveal patterns and meanings about how participants manage the balance between work and personal life.

3 RESULT

The results of the in-depth interviews with the subjects are presented in the following table of findings, in which the subjects' experiences are divided into four aspects: work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, personal life enhancement of work, and work enhancement of personal life.

Table 1 : table of interview findings

Aspect	Subject 1 (UA)	Subject 2 (WI)	Subject 3 (OP)
Work Interference With Personal Life	Scheduling activities regularly	Prioritizing work	Being flexible in sharing responbilities
Personal Life Interference With Work	Emotional state affect cwork concentration	Able to adjust to condition	Able to maintain professionalism
Personal Life Enhancement Of Work	Self-reward increases self satisfaction	Self recovery through rest	Energy recovery through personal activities

Work Enhancement Of Personal Life	Utilizing teamwork	Receiving from coworkers	Having a greater sense of responbility

In-depth interviews conducted with three research subjects yielded various experiences regarding how they juggled their dual roles as nurses and housewives. These experiences were then analyzed and grouped into four main aspects of work-life balance, namely work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), personal life enhancement of work (PLEW), and work enhancement of personal life (WEPL). The following is an explanation of the interview results based on these four aspects:

Aspect 1: Work Interference With Personal Life (WIPL)

The first aspect explored was work interference with personal life (WIPL), which shows the extent to which work interferes with personal life. Interviews with the three subjects yielded the following results:

a) Subject UA showed that although the demands of her job as a nurse often did not have fixed hours due to the shift system, she tried to manage her work so that it did not interfere too much with her household affairs. Subject UA manages her time by scheduling activities using an application on her cell phone to organize her work hours and household activities.

"...the way I manage my time is by making plans, just like I make a schedule on my cell phone..."

From this statement, it can be understood that UA emphasizes the importance of planning in maintaining a balance between work and personal life.

b) Subject WI indicated that the main strategy used is to prioritize tasks. The subject emphasized,

"...to manage our time, we must be able to prioritize what tasks we need to do..."

This statement reflects that the subject places more emphasis on time management by sorting activities based on their level of urgency and importance. This approach allows the subject to focus their energy and attention on the most urgent tasks first, both at work and in their household responsibilities.

c) Subject OP indicates that flexibility is the key to managing responsibilities between work and roles at home.

"...managing time between work as a nurse and responsibilities as a mother is a challenge in itself... the most important thing is flexibility, because sometimes there are things that cannot be avoided, such as sudden calls from the hospital or emergencies at home..."

This statement shows that the subject is aware of the dynamics of dividing the roles they play. Flexibility is seen as an important strategy to ensure that both responsibilities are balanced.

Aspect 2: Personal Life Interference With Work (PLIW)

The second aspect is personal life interference with work (PLIW), which describes the influence of personal life on work. The interview results show that:

a) Subject UA indicated that personal life, especially emotional conditions, affects work concentration. Subject UA revealed,

"...my child is still young and needs full attention, while I have to divide my time with work. In addition, the divorce process often makes me feel anxious about my child's future. Sometimes those thoughts carry over to work, so I have to make an extra effort to stay focused on my work...".

This statement illustrates the interference from personal life that affects performance at work.

b) Subject WI showed that they had the ability to adjust their personal circumstances so that they did not interfere with their work.

"...usually I communicate with my husband or family... if that's not possible, I rearrange my household schedule, so yeah, we have to be smart in adjusting to the circumstances at that time..."

This statement shows that the subject uses communication and schedule adjustments as strategies to reduce distractions from personal life.

c) Subject OP shows that even though personal problems can interfere with work concentration, the subject still tries to maintain professionalism. The subject states,

"...the divorce process often distracts my mind when I'm working, and sometimes it's difficult to concentrate when treating patients... but, well, we work in the field of public service, so I try to remain professional..."

This statement illustrates that the subject tries to suppress emotional distractions from their personal life in order to remain focused on their professional duties.

Aspect 3: Personal Life Enhancement Of Work (PLEW)

The third aspect is Personal Life Enhancement Of Work (PLEW), which emphasizes the positive contribution of personal life to performance. The following was obtained from the interviews:

a) The UA subjects used self-reward to increase self-satisfaction. Subjects engage in activities they enjoy, especially on days off, as a form of self-reward. This includes pursuing hobbies or shopping for items they like.

"....*For things I like, I usually do them on my days off... usually doing my hobbies or just shopping for something I like, like... making it a self-reward, ma'am...*".

b) WI subjects use their break time as a form of self-recovery after completing their work priorities. The subject maximizes time at home by resting as much as possible after completing household chores. "....*for that, maybe after my work priorities, when my work is done and it's time to go home, I make the most of my time at home, after I've done my household chores... as much as possible, I rest regardless of my condition...*".

c) Subject OP engages in favorite activities or hobbies as a form of energy recovery from heavy workloads. The subject states that even though time is limited, he still sets aside time to do things that bring personal happiness and satisfaction.

"...*I always set aside time for things that make me happy, even if it's only for a short time... So it's like recharging my energy, hahaha...*"

Aspect 4: Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL)

The last aspect is work enhancement of personal life (WEPL), which reflects the positive impact of work on a person's quality of life. The following results were obtained from the interviews:

a) Subject UA utilizes cooperation with their team or coworkers to carry out their duties at work. With good team coordination, subject UA feels

that their work is much easier, so it does not interfere with their time outside of working hours.

"...*because my work is a team effort, so if there is work that has not been completed and can be transferred to the next team, I will ask for help from the next team that is better able to handle it...*"

b) Subject WI indicated that social support from coworkers is an important factor in helping them maintain a balance between work and personal life. A supportive work environment provides a sense of security and motivation, making them feel more capable of facing daily work challenges.

"...*in my opinion, the support of coworkers greatly affects our lives, so it's very important. Especially since I work with them every day, meet them every day, they are like my second family... if I have problems or anything, they usually give me support, encourage me...*".

c) Subject OP revealed that her work experience as a nurse has shaped her sense of responsibility, not only in the work environment but also in her household life. This increased sense of responsibility is particularly evident in her role as a mother who has to take care of her children amid the divorce she is currently going through.

"*I feel that I have more responsibilities from my job as a nurse that carry over into my home life... I am more*

responsible for my children, especially now that I am in the process of separating from my husband..."

4　DISCUSSION

In terms of work interference with personal life (WIPL), the three subjects showed different strategies in dealing wih the potential interference of work in their personal lives. Subject UA relied on planning through digital applications to schedule household and work activities, so that even though the shift work system was often unpredictable, she was still able to manage the balance of her roles. Subject WI emphasized priorization, sorting work and household responsibilities based on urgency. Meanwhile, subject OP relied more on flexibility in dealing with unexpected conditions, such as sudden calls from the hospital or family problems at home. These finding indicate that planning, prioritization, and flexibility are three relevant adaptive strategies for reducing WIPL conflicts. This is in line with research by Berglund et al., (2021) which states that low levels of WIPL correlate with increased physical and mental work capacity, as well as the views of Greenhaus & Powell (2006) who emphasize the importance of flexibility in managing work and family demands.

The second aspect, Personal Life Interference With Work (PLIW), describes the influence of personal life on work. UA subjects revealed that emotional conditions related to divorce and the responsibility of caring for children often affected their concentration at work. This confirms that the emotional burden of personal life can have a negative impact on work performance (Saptarani et al., 2022). Unlike UA, WI subjects demonstrated adaptive abilities by communicating with their families and adjusting their household schedules so as not to interfere with their work. OP subjects, despite facing similar problems as UA, still tried to maintain professionalism in serving patients. These results are in line with the findings of Huda et al., (2025) which show that the majority of nurses have moderate to high levels of stress, indicating that personal life has the potential to significantly interfere with work. The communication, adjustment, and professionalism strategies used by the subjects are important factors in minimizing the negative impact of PLIW.

In terms of Personal Life Enhancement Of Work (PLEW), all three subjects showed that personal life can contribute positively to work. Subject UA utilized self-reward in the form of pursuing hobbies or shopping to increase self-satisfaction. Subject WI used break time as a form of energy recovery after completing household priorities. Meanwhile, subject OP set aside time to pursue hobbies, even if only briefly, which served as a means of recharging emotional energy. These results support the view of Fisher, Bulger, dan Smith (2009) hat the enhancement aspect plays a role in increasing individuals' energy and motivation in facing work demands (Fisher et al., 2009). Thus, a positively managed personal life can be an important resource for work, although its effects are relatively less significant than work conflicts (Wiati, 2024).

The last aspect, Work Enhancement Of Personal Life (WEPL), shows how work can have a

positive impact on personal life. UA subjects emphasized the importance of teamwork in carrying out tasks, so that unfinished work could be transferred to colleagues without disrupting their personal lives. WI subjects felt social support from colleagues who served as a source of encouragement, security, and motivation. Meanwhile, the OP subjects revealed that their work as nurses actually fostered a sense of responsibility that carried over into their home lives, especially in their role as mothers amid divorce. These results are in line with the work-to-family enrichment theory from Greenhaus & Powell (2006) which states that positive experiences at work can enrich the quality of life outside of work. Additionally, research by (Nuurramadhan & Darmastuti, 2024) and (Aura & Hutahaean, 2025) also shows that job control, social support, and a collaborative work environment are protective factors that improve work-life balance.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that work-life balance is not only related to how individuals reduce conflicts between work and personal life, but also how they are able to take advantage of positive interactions between the two. Planning, prioritization, and flexibility have been proven effective in reducing WIPL conflicts, while family communication and social support from coworkers help minimize the impact of PLIW. Self-recovery activities such as self-reward, rest, and hobbies strengthen PLEW, while teamwork and social support strengthen WEPL.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that work-life balance among nursing subjects is formed through four main aspects, namely work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), personal life enhancement of work (PLEW), and work enhancement of personal life (WEPL). Each subject has different strategies for managing dual roles, such as scheduling activities, setting priorities, maintaining flexibility, and utilizing social support. Personal life can be either an obstacle or a driver of performance, depending on how individuals manage their emotions, communication, and forms of self-recovery. In addition, nursing work not only demands professionalism but also contributes positively to personal responsibility and quality of life.

Based on these findings, it is important for nurses and health institutions to create a work environment that supports work-life balance, for example through more flexible work schedules, the provision of recovery rooms, and the strengthening of social support in the workplace. Individuals are also advised to develop self-management strategies such as activity planning, communication with family, and the application of self-care as a form of self-appreciation. Thus, the balance between work and personal life can be maintained, which ultimately improves the psychological well-being and performance of nurses.

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