

# EXPLORING CHALLENGES FACED BY DUAL-CAREER COUPLES AMONG NURSES IN PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN. QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

*Original Research*

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Dual-career couples are increasingly common globally, with significant implications for work-life balance, particularly in professions like nursing that demand intensive time and emotional investment. Rising inflation, economic challenges, and evolving societal roles have contributed to the growth of dual-career households. In Pakistan, these dynamics are further influenced by traditional gender expectations, posing unique challenges for nurses and their families. Understanding these challenges is vital for developing effective interventions to support dual-career couples in achieving a sustainable balance between professional and personal lives.

**Objective:** To explore the challenges faced by dual-career couples among nurses in Peshawar, Pakistan, focusing on work, family, and social dimensions, and identify strategies for managing these challenges.

**Methods:** A qualitative descriptive study was conducted over six months in four healthcare institutions in Peshawar, including Ruffaidah Nursing College, Kuwait Teaching Hospital, Mercy Teaching Hospital, and Prime Teaching Hospital. Using purposive sampling, 24 dual-career couples (48 participants) aged 20–55 were recruited. Participants were legally married, with at least one spouse holding a nursing license. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained prior to the study.

**Results:** Key challenges identified included time management (80%), work-life balance (75%), and financial stress (60%). Participants reported limited time for personal activities (85%) and difficulties attending family functions (70%). Job-related stress impacted family relationships in 65% of couples. Strategies like mutual support (90%) and effective communication (85%) helped mitigate these challenges. Dual-career dynamics were particularly influenced by irregular work schedules and cultural expectations.

**Conclusion:** Dual-career couples in nursing face multifaceted challenges that impact their well-being and relationships. Supportive workplace policies, flexible scheduling, and societal interventions are crucial to promoting work-life balance and enhancing the quality of life for these couples.

**Keywords:** Family Relations, Financial Stress, Nurses, Pakistan, Professional Burnout, Time Management, Work-Life Balance.

## INTRODUCTION

Nurses, often regarded as the backbone of the healthcare system, make invaluable contributions to their profession. However, the rising global inflation rates and economic demands have made it increasingly challenging for families to rely on a single income. This economic reality has led to the growing prevalence of dual-career couples, where both partners actively contribute as breadwinners while managing familial responsibilities. Globally, this shift is evident, with 60% of British households, 40% of American households, and 52% of married families in Australia now comprising dual-earner dyads. Between 1979 and 1996, the number of dual-earner couples surged by 58%, coinciding with a 66% increase in women entering the workforce. In Malaysia, the female labor force participation rose to 39% in 2019, reflecting a global trend of increasing female workforce engagement (1–6). Dual-career couples are defined as partners who simultaneously pursue professional careers while maintaining a shared family life. This dynamic provides additional financial stability and enhances societal status but introduces unique challenges, particularly in balancing work and family life. Research highlights a variety of issues faced by dual-career couples, including work-related stressors, interpersonal conflicts, and difficulties in maintaining job satisfaction (7–9). Specifically, individuals frequently report challenges with colleagues, supervisors, and career progression, while their partners often face similar concerns (9).

Within the nursing profession, these challenges are particularly pronounced due to the demanding nature of the work. Nurses frequently endure long hours, emotionally taxing responsibilities, and irregular schedules, exacerbating the difficulty of achieving a work-life balance. Studies indicate that dual-career nursing couples, comprising a significant portion of the healthcare workforce, encounter heightened stress levels as they navigate overlapping professional and personal domains (10–13). Moreover, the traditional family model, characterized by a single breadwinner, has gradually been replaced by dual-career arrangements, prompting shifts in societal and familial expectations (7, 11). Despite the progress in gender roles, women in dual-career relationships often bear a disproportionate burden of household and childcare responsibilities. This imbalance contributes to emotional strain and complicates their ability to prioritize career advancement alongside familial obligations. Conversely, men, while less involved in caregiving, often face the pressure of being primary financial providers, which presents its own set of challenges. The pursuit of professional success, combined with the demands of parenthood, underscores the need for equitable sharing of responsibilities within dual-career households (8, 15). For nurses, particularly those in regions like Pakistan where socio-economic pressures are high, these challenges are magnified by cultural expectations and limited support systems.

The rise of dual-career couples represents a fundamental shift in family dynamics and workplace structures, emphasizing the necessity of balancing professional and personal roles. However, achieving this balance remains a significant challenge, as evidenced by increased levels of stress and conflict. While the dual-career lifestyle offers women opportunities to integrate professional and familial aspirations, it also raises critical questions about the sustainability of such arrangements, particularly in demanding professions like nursing (14, 17–19). This study aims to explore the challenges faced by dual-career couples among nurses in Peshawar, Pakistan. By examining the intersection of professional and personal responsibilities, the research seeks to shed light on the factors that influence work-life balance, providing insights into the experiences of these couples. The objective is to identify strategies that may mitigate these challenges, fostering an improved understanding of dual-career dynamics within the healthcare sector.

## METHODS

The study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of dual-career couples within the nursing profession. It was conducted over a six-month period across four healthcare institutions in Peshawar, namely Rufaidah Nursing College, Kuwait Teaching Hospital, Mercy Teaching Hospital, and Prime Teaching Hospital. The tentative sample size ranged from 20 to 30 couples, with adjustments made as necessary based on the principle of data saturation. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure maximum variation among participants who voluntarily expressed interest in the study. The inclusion criteria specified legally married dual-career couples aged between 20 and 55 years, with at least one spouse holding a valid nursing license. Couples who were divorced, retired, or bereaved were excluded from the study to maintain consistency in the participant profile. Ethical considerations were a cornerstone of the research process. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Review Committee, and written permissions were secured from the

respective department heads of the participating institutions. Participants provided informed consent after being briefed about the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature of participation. The research adhered to ethical principles to ensure respect, autonomy, and protection of participants throughout the study.

Data collection involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants to gain rich, detailed insights into their experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure rigor and systematic analysis, the data underwent a multi-step thematic analysis, following the framework established by Braun and Clark (2006). Open coding was performed in the initial phase to identify meaningful data segments, which were subsequently categorized in the second phase. In the final phase, selective coding was conducted to align the emerging themes with the study's objectives. This process facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and unique insights that highlighted the challenges faced by dual-career couples in the nursing profession. The study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the professional and personal challenges encountered by dual-career couples, contributing valuable insights to this underexplored area of healthcare research.

## RESULTS

The study explored the multifaceted challenges faced by dual-career couples in the nursing profession, revealing key themes centered on financial stress, support mechanisms, time management, work-life balance, and personal well-being. Participants consistently highlighted the economic pressures stemming from rising inflation and the necessity of dual incomes to sustain household expenses. Financial independence was considered a significant advantage, providing stability and enabling investments in education and healthcare. However, these financial benefits often came at the cost of personal interaction and time spent together due to the demanding and irregular schedules of both partners. The importance of mutual support and cooperation between partners was emphasized as a critical factor in managing the dual demands of professional and personal lives. Couples relied on one another to navigate challenges such as long work hours, childcare, and household responsibilities. Effective communication and a willingness to compromise were noted as essential strategies for maintaining harmony in the relationship despite the pressures of a dual-career lifestyle.

Time management emerged as a significant challenge, with many participants reporting difficulty in allocating time for rest, personal activities, and family commitments. Nurses in particular faced struggles with irregular duty rotations, which hindered their ability to attend family events, plan social activities, or dedicate time to self-care. The cumulative impact of these challenges often led to physical exhaustion, frustration, and an imbalance in personal well-being. Work-life balance was another recurring theme, with participants highlighting the need to balance demanding professional responsibilities with family obligations. The irregular nature of nursing schedules often disrupted family life and reduced opportunities for quality time with children and extended family members. Strategies such as seeking support from family members and fostering understanding with supervisors were described as crucial in mitigating these challenges.

The impact of job-related stress on personal life and well-being was frequently discussed. Nurses and their spouses reported feelings of exhaustion and frustration that affected not only their relationships but also their interactions with patients and the quality of care provided. Participants noted that the cumulative stress from work often carried over into their personal lives, creating tensions within the family. Social life was significantly affected by the demanding work schedules, with many couples reporting difficulties in attending social gatherings, maintaining relationships with extended family, and participating in community events. Cultural expectations, such as attending family functions, further exacerbated the strain on their time and energy. Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong sense of community and support within their families, which often served as a buffer against the pressures of their dual-career roles.

Participants also discussed various strategies to overcome the challenges associated with dual-career dynamics. These included prioritizing quality time with family, fostering a supportive environment, and adopting effective time management techniques. While financial independence was seen as a critical advantage, participants acknowledged that it required significant sacrifices in terms of personal and family time. The findings underscore the complex interplay between professional and personal responsibilities among dual-career nursing couples, highlighting the need for systemic support and tailored interventions to address their unique challenges.

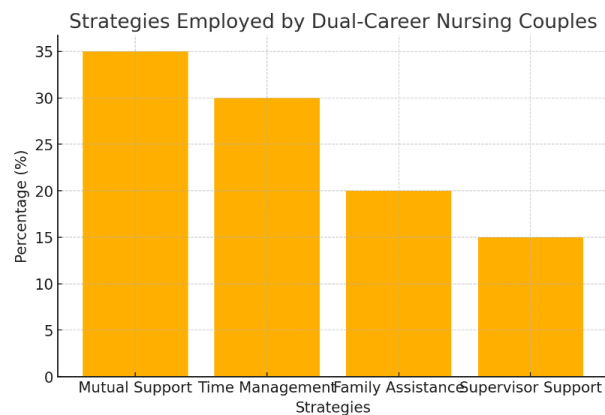


Figure 2 Strategies Employed By Dual-Career Nursing Couples

Proportion of Challenges Faced by Dual-Career Nursing Couples

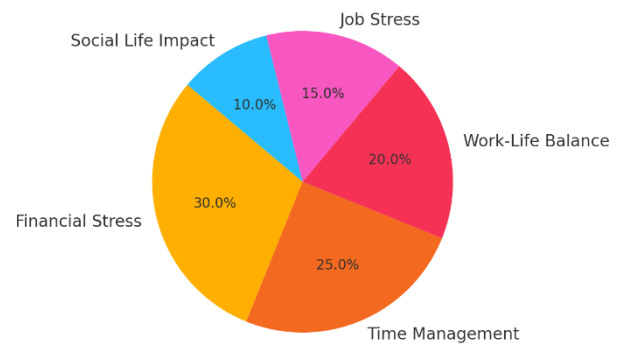


Figure 1 Proportion Of Challenges Faced By Dual-Career Nursing Couples

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by dual-career couples in the nursing profession, which include work-related, personal, family, and social challenges. These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes the difficulties faced by dual-career professionals in managing overlapping professional and personal responsibilities. The challenges of time management and work-life balance emerged as particularly significant, reflecting broader issues documented in other studies that explore the dual roles of caregivers and professionals in healthcare settings (1,2,13). The increase in women's participation in the workforce, driven by rising inflation and societal evolution, has shifted traditional gender roles and created a new dynamic within families. This shift has resulted in dual-career couples becoming more common as families strive to maintain financial stability and meet their needs. However, this transition has brought additional stressors, particularly for women, who often bear a disproportionate share of family responsibilities alongside their professional duties. These findings resonate with previous studies that have noted the rising prevalence of role conflicts among working women, particularly in demanding fields such as nursing (8,14).

Work-related challenges among dual-career couples, such as long hours, irregular schedules, and the emotional demands of caregiving, were evident in this study. Nurses, in particular, face the added pressure of balancing their responsibilities to patients with the needs of their families. Upon returning home, many continue to shoulder the bulk of household and caregiving responsibilities, leading to physical exhaustion and emotional strain. This phenomenon has been documented in other research, which highlights how dual-career lifestyles often exacerbate stress and role conflict, particularly in professions requiring high levels of dedication and compassion (17–19). Time management challenges stood out as a recurrent theme in this study. Dual-career couples reported struggles in allocating time for personal grooming, rest, self-care, and quality time with family. The inability to effectively manage time not only impacts personal health and well-being but also influences family dynamics and the quality of relationships. These findings align with broader research that identifies time constraints as a critical barrier to achieving work-life balance in dual-career households (8,17).

The implications of these findings are significant for both the healthcare sector and broader societal structures. For nursing professionals, in particular, the demands of their dual roles underscore the need for systemic interventions, such as flexible scheduling and institutional support, to alleviate their challenges. The findings also call attention to the importance of fostering equitable sharing of responsibilities within families and promoting societal changes that support working women in balancing their professional and personal lives. This study's strengths include its focus on an underexplored population—dual-career nursing couples in a region where traditional gender roles and cultural expectations further compound the challenges of dual careers. By using a qualitative approach, it captured the lived experiences of participants, providing nuanced insights into the complexities of balancing professional and family roles. However, the study was not without limitations. The sample size, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, was relatively small and drawn from a specific geographic area, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study did not explore the perspectives of children or extended family members, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by dual-career couples.

Future research could address these limitations by including larger, more diverse samples and incorporating quantitative data to strengthen the findings. Exploring the perspectives of other family members or using longitudinal designs to assess changes over time

could provide deeper insights. Furthermore, examining the impact of organizational policies and societal structures on dual-career couples may offer practical recommendations for reducing the challenges identified in this study. In conclusion, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence highlighting the challenges faced by dual-career couples, particularly in professions like nursing. It underscores the need for targeted interventions, both at the institutional and societal levels, to support dual-career couples in achieving work-life balance and maintaining their well-being while navigating the complexities of their dual roles.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that dual-career couples among nurses in Peshawar face a complex interplay of challenges that affect their personal, professional, family, and social lives. These challenges reflect broader societal changes, including the increasing participation of women in the workforce and shifting family dynamics. Addressing these issues requires targeted efforts by healthcare institutions, policymakers, and society to develop supportive strategies and systems that enable dual-career couples to achieve a balance between their work and personal responsibilities. By shedding light on these challenges, this research contributes valuable insights that can guide the development of policies and interventions to improve the well-being and work-life balance of dual-career couples in demanding professions like nursing.

## Authors' Contribution

Author	Contribution
Saad Mujahid Khan*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Kamran Ullah	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Shaheer Ahmad	Substantial Contribution to acquisition and interpretation of Data Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Abid Ur Rehman	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Farzana Wali	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Irum Jabeen	Substantial Contribution to study design and Data Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Fath Ur Rahman	Contributed to study concept and Data collection Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Shabana Issac	Writing - Review & Editing, Assistance with Data Curation

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