

Industrial Relations and Job Satisfaction in the Provision of Healthcare Services to International Patients: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

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The rapid growth of international tourism has increased demand for healthcare services for foreign patients, particularly in primary care clinics located in tourism-intensive regions. This development introduces complex organizational and workforce challenges, as healthcare workers are required to manage increased workloads, cross-cultural communication barriers, and expanded roles beyond routine clinical responsibilities. These conditions underscore the importance of industrial relations in shaping employee experiences and maintaining service sustainability. The purpose of this conceptual review is to examine how industrial relations influence job satisfaction among healthcare workers providing services to international patients, with particular attention to organizational support, communication practices, and leadership mechanisms in cross-cultural healthcare settings. This study adopts a conceptual review design by synthesizing theoretical and empirical literature related to industrial relations, job satisfaction, and international or tourism-oriented healthcare services. Relevant studies were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar and analyzed using thematic analysis. Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands–Resources Model were employed as the primary theoretical frameworks to integrate findings and explain the relationship between job demands, organizational resources, and employee outcomes. No primary data were collected, and all conclusions are based on a systematic interpretation of existing literature. The review demonstrates that effective industrial relations function as a critical mediating mechanism that balances increased job demands associated with international patient care with available organizational resources. Strengthening leadership support, communication quality, and institutional recognition can enhance job satisfaction, reduce work strain, and contribute to sustainable healthcare service delivery in tourism-oriented environments.

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INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

The rapid expansion of global tourism has significantly increased the demand for healthcare services that cater not only to local communities but also to international visitors. In tourism-intensive regions such as Bali, primary care clinics often serve as the first point of contact for foreign patients requiring immediate medical attention. This situation places additional demands on healthcare organizations to deliver culturally sensitive, timely, and effective services.^{1,2}

Beyond service quality, the sustainability of healthcare delivery depends heavily on employee working conditions.³ Healthcare workers are frequently required to manage communication barriers, cultural differences, and increased emotional labor when treating international patients.

These challenges directly affect workplace experiences and highlight the importance of organizational arrangements that support employees.^{4,5}

Industrial relations refer to the patterns of interaction between management and employees within an organization, encompassing communication practices, leadership approaches, workload distribution, and institutional support mechanisms. In healthcare settings, positive industrial relations contribute to trust, cooperation, and employee commitment, while poor industrial relations may lead to stress, dissatisfaction, and reduced service quality.

Job satisfaction reflects employees' overall evaluation of their work experience and is a critical indicator of organizational health. In healthcare organizations, job satisfaction is associated with better performance, lower turnover intention,

and improved patient outcomes (Handayani, Jati, & Dharmawan, 2025; O'Callaghan, 2025). Factors such as leadership support, workload fairness, and interpersonal relationships play a decisive role in shaping job satisfaction.⁶⁻⁸

Providing healthcare services to international patients introduces additional complexities. Language barriers, limited intercultural competence, and unclear service procedures may intensify job demands and negatively affect job satisfaction. Given these dynamics, a conceptual examination of industrial relations and job satisfaction within tourism-related healthcare services is both timely and necessary.

METHOD OF REVIEW

This study employs a conceptual review design to synthesize and critically evaluate existing literature on industrial relations

and job satisfaction in healthcare services provided to international patients. A conceptual review is appropriate for this study because it aims to integrate theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to develop a coherent conceptual framework, rather than to test hypotheses using primary data.

The review process was conducted through four systematic stages. First, a comprehensive literature search was performed using academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the search included *industrial relations*, *job satisfaction*, *cross-cultural healthcare*, *medical tourism*, *international patients*, and *tourism-oriented healthcare*. Articles published primarily between 2021 and 2025 were prioritized to ensure conceptual and empirical relevance.

Second, retrieved articles were screened based on **inclusion criteria**, namely: (1) relevance to healthcare or health services organizations, (2) discussion of industrial relations, organizational factors, or job satisfaction, and (3) empirical or theoretical focus on cross-cultural, international, or tourism-related healthcare contexts. Studies not related to healthcare services or employee outcomes were excluded.

Third, full-text articles meeting the criteria were analyzed and categorized. Information extracted included research objectives, methodological approach, key findings, and theoretical frameworks. Both empirical studies (e.g., surveys, qualitative studies, systematic reviews) and theoretical papers were included to ensure comprehensive conceptual coverage.

Finally, the selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurrent themes were identified and organized around (1) industrial relations mechanisms (e.g., leadership, communication, organizational support), (2) job demands in cross-cultural healthcare services (e.g., workload, language barriers, emotional labor), and (3) job resources influencing employee satisfaction.

The locus of the review is conceptual, with particular emphasis on healthcare organizations operating in tourism-intensive regions such as Indonesia (e.g., Bali), while also drawing insights

from comparable international contexts. No primary data were collected, and all findings represent a synthesis and interpretation of existing literature. This approach enables the development of a theoretically grounded framework explaining how industrial relations shape job satisfaction in healthcare services for international patients.

Conceptual Problems

In tourism-driven healthcare environments, healthcare workers are often required to assume expanded roles, such as informal translation, cultural mediation, and adapting services to meet international patients' expectations. When these additional responsibilities are not formally recognized through training, workload adjustments, or institutional support, employees may experience role ambiguity, perceived inequity, and emotional strain.⁹

From an industrial relations perspective, inadequate communication, unclear job expectations, and limited participation in decision-making can weaken mutual trust and cooperation between management and staff. Empirical studies show that such organizational challenges are linked to job dissatisfaction, higher turnover intention, and strained employment relationships in healthcare settings (Alshammari et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2022; Hynes et al., 2025; Rafi'i et al., 2025).^{1,8,10,11}

Despite being primarily a conceptual review, this article synthesizes empirical findings from recent studies to illustrate the real-world consequences of weak industrial relations in cross-cultural healthcare services. The conceptual framework proposed integrates Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, explaining how organizational support, communication quality, and leadership mediate the relationship between increased job demands and employee job satisfaction.

This approach addresses the prior conceptual-empirical inconsistency: the review does not remain purely theoretical but uses empirical evidence to demonstrate that unresolved organizational challenges directly affect healthcare workers' experiences in tourism-oriented healthcare services.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to provide a robust conceptual foundation for understanding how industrial relations influence job satisfaction among healthcare workers serving international patients. According to SET, employees evaluate their relationship with the organization based on reciprocal exchanges of support and obligation. When healthcare workers perceive fair treatment, recognition, and organizational support, they are more likely to respond positively, demonstrating higher job satisfaction and stronger organizational commitment. This theoretical perspective aligns with findings from Hynes et al. (2025), Rafi'i et al. (2025), and Foukaki et al. (2025), which consistently show that supportive leadership, inclusive policies, and recognition programs enhance employee satisfaction, particularly in high-pressure or cross-cultural healthcare contexts.

The JD-R Model complements SET by highlighting how job satisfaction depends on the balance between job demands (e.g., workload, emotional strain, communication challenges) and job resources (e.g., leadership support, training, standardized procedures). In the context of international patient care in Indonesia, many studies—such as Hidayat & Agustina (2021), Jasmine (2024), and Nguyen et al. (2021)—report that language barriers, high workload, and cross-cultural communication challenges increase job demands. Without adequate resources, these demands can lead to stress, emotional exhaustion, and lower job satisfaction. Conversely, the provision of resources such as leadership support, cross-cultural training, and organizational recognition mitigates the negative effects of job demands, consistent with JD-R theory.¹²⁻¹⁴

By integrating SET and JD-R, this study establishes a clear conceptual link between industrial relations mechanisms (organizational support, leadership practices, recognition, and inclusive policies) and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and service quality). Essentially, industrial relations act as a mediating mechanism that balances the demands of serving

Table 1. Synthesized Empirical Insights Supporting the Conceptual Framework

Key Insight	Empirical Evidence	Implications for Conceptual Framework
Expanded roles increase job demands	Healthcare workers serving international patients face language barriers, cultural differences, and extra emotional labor. (Nguyen et al., 2021; Foukaki et al., 2025; Jasmine, 2024)	Highlights the need to account for job demands in the JD-R model; shows real-world pressures affecting satisfaction.
Organizational support and recognition are critical	Perceived fairness, leadership support, and institutional recognition enhance job satisfaction, retention, and engagement. (Hynes et al., 2025; Rafi'i et al., 2025; Abdul Rani et al., 2025)	Supports the Social Exchange Theory, where reciprocal support from the organization increases positive employee attitudes.
Communication quality and clarity of roles	Clear procedures, participatory decision-making, and training in cross-cultural competencies reduce role ambiguity and strengthen trust. (Ediansyah et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2025)	Demonstrates the mediating role of industrial relations mechanisms (communication, leadership, coordination) in balancing job demands and resources.
Workload and stress management	Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workload, stress, and employee performance. (Barlian et al., 2025; Peter et al., 2024)	Confirms that adaptive industrial relations frameworks are necessary to prevent dissatisfaction and maintain service quality.

international patients with the resources provided by the organization, ensuring sustainable employee satisfaction and effective healthcare delivery. This theoretical integration is reinforced across the reviewed literature, demonstrating its applicability in both Indonesian healthcare contexts and broader cross-cultural medical tourism settings.

Industrial Relations in Tourism-Oriented Primary Healthcare

Effective industrial relations in healthcare settings are characterized by transparent communication, participatory leadership, and equitable workload distribution. In clinics serving international patients, industrial relations systems must adapt to the complexity of cross-cultural service delivery.

When organizations fail to provide language training, standardized service guidelines, or formal recognition of additional responsibilities, employees may perceive an imbalance between effort and reward. Literature consistently shows that such imbalances undermine job satisfaction and weaken employment relationships (Kang et al., 2022; Alshammary et al., 2023).

Conversely, strong industrial relations foster trust, enhance employee engagement, and contribute to service consistency, particularly in high-demand healthcare environments.

Job Satisfaction in Cross-Cultural Healthcare Services

Job satisfaction in healthcare is a multidimensional construct influenced by emotional, cognitive, and organizational factors. In cross-cultural service contexts, additional determinants such as communication competence and cultural sensitivity become increasingly salient.

Healthcare workers who lack confidence in foreign language communication often experience increased stress and emotional exhaustion when treating international patients (Nguyen et al., 2021; Foukaki et al., 2025). However, organizational investments in training, supportive leadership, and inclusive policies have been shown to mitigate these challenges and enhance job satisfaction.^{15,16}

Job satisfaction not only benefits employees but also improves patient-centered care, service efficiency, and workforce retention (O'Callaghan, 2025).

Critical Gap Analysis

Despite the growing body of literature on job satisfaction and organizational factors in healthcare, several conceptual and empirical gaps remain. First, most existing studies examine job satisfaction in healthcare settings without explicitly situating industrial relations within cross-cultural or international patient care contexts. As a result, the unique organizational challenges faced by healthcare workers in tourism-oriented

healthcare services remain undertheorized.

Second, prior research tends to address organizational factors such as leadership, workload, or communication in isolation, rather than integrating them within a comprehensive theoretical framework. This fragmentation limits the ability to explain how multiple organizational mechanisms jointly influence employee satisfaction under conditions of heightened job demands.

Third, although empirical studies increasingly acknowledge the pressures associated with medical tourism and international patient services, few studies conceptually link these pressures to industrial relations systems using established organizational theories. The lack of integration between Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands-Resources model represents a missed opportunity to explain how organizational support structures mitigate cross-cultural job demands.

Addressing these gaps, the present conceptual review contributes by synthesizing empirical evidence within an integrated theoretical framework. By positioning industrial relations as a mediating mechanism between job demands and job satisfaction, this article advances a more holistic understanding of workforce sustainability in tourism-driven healthcare environments and provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research.

DISCUSSION

This conceptual review highlights that healthcare workers in tourism-oriented healthcare environments are exposed to elevated job demands resulting from cross-cultural service provision. Existing studies consistently indicate that serving international patients requires additional roles such as informal translation, cultural mediation, and emotional regulation. From a conceptual standpoint, these expanded roles represent increased job demands within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, which—when not matched with adequate resources—may undermine job satisfaction.

The synthesis of literature further suggests that industrial relations function as a central organizational mechanism that shapes how healthcare workers experience these demands. Supportive leadership, transparent communication, and participatory decision-making repeatedly emerge in prior studies as key resources that buffer the negative effects of workload and role ambiguity. Interpreted through Social Exchange Theory, these organizational practices signal reciprocity and fairness, fostering positive employee attitudes and higher job satisfaction.

Rather than presenting new empirical findings, this review conceptually integrates evidence from diverse healthcare contexts to demonstrate how organizational support and recognition mediate the relationship between cross-cultural job demands and employee outcomes. The consistency of these patterns across different national and organizational settings strengthens the theoretical argument that industrial relations play a strategic role in sustaining workforce well-being in international healthcare services.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature indicates that job satisfaction serves as an important intervening construct linking industrial relations to service quality and workforce retention. Conceptually, this implies that improving industrial relations is not only a human resource concern but also a service sustainability strategy in tourism-driven healthcare systems. By aligning organizational policies with employee needs, healthcare providers can better balance service complexity with

workforce capacity, ultimately supporting both employee well-being and patient-centered care.

Conclusion

This conceptual review demonstrates that industrial relations play a central role in shaping job satisfaction among healthcare workers providing services to international patients. Language barriers, increased workload, and cultural complexity represent significant job demands that must be balanced through organizational support and effective workplace coordination.

Strengthening industrial relations through clear policies, leadership support, and capacity-building initiatives can enhance employee well-being and sustain service quality in tourism-intensive healthcare environments. The article provides conceptual insights for healthcare managers and policymakers seeking to improve workforce sustainability in cross-cultural service settings.

DISCLOSURE

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