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REVIEW ARTICLE

The impact of servant leadership in nursing practice at the hospital: A literature review

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Abstract

Leadership style in nursing has influenced nurses and patients at hospitals. One of the styles suitable to put into practice is servant leadership, as there found valuable similarities in characteristics, such as being altruistic, serving, and healing. Servant leadership in nursing is closely related to the ability to influence nurse teams and hospital patients. This study aims to identify servant leadership's effects on nurses as a team and patients at hospitals. The research method used is the literature review. Database Scienedirect, Proquest, Scopus, Clinicalkey, and SpringerLink are explored to search the desired articles by selecting keywords "Servant Leadership" AND "Patient" AND "Nurse." Papers selected as the data sources meet the following inclusion criteria, i.e., full-text articles published between 2012-2022 and discussing servant leadership in nursing. After studying four pieces, it is found that servant leadership acts on both nurses and patients. The effects of servant leadership on nurses are in innovative behaviour, job performance, and nurse satisfaction. In contrast, its impact on the patients is in their satisfaction after using the health care services.

Keywords: Leadership; nursing management; quality of care; nursing care; clinical nursing practice

Introduction

Leadership is the main factor in focusing all organizational elements in achieving its goals (Al-Asadi et al., 2019). Leadership is also considered a compound and multidimensional concept covering intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and situational variables (Grohar-Murray & Langan, 2011). Leadership could be an attempt to influence others to understand and agree with how to do it and to facilitate staff collecting efforts to meet an organization's shared goals (Schyve, 2009). These are all important in leadership, which helps an organization augment efficiency. To say leadership is an action to influence others positively (Millward & Bryan, 2005). Understanding leadership can be viewed from several aspects of it. There are at least three essential aspects of leadership and leadership and they are 1) Leaders must involve other people, namely staff, subordinates, or group members, where they will confirm the status as a leader; 2) leadership includes the distribution of power where the group members have power but the power of organizational leaders tends to be higher; and 3) leadership as the ability to use power. The power possessed by the leader is used to influence the behaviour of group members to achieve organizational goals (Sutrisno, 2010). Other studies show the aspects or practices of leadership, such as networking, problem-solving skills, self-image, communication, crisis team management, emotional intelligence, and spirituality (Cummings et al., 2021a). Those aspects are considered incredibly important in leadership, especially in health care services, referred to as clinical leadership.

The complexity of high-quality health services is increasing, and health services are quickly changing. Quality leadership must inevitably deal with those complexities and changes (West et al., 2015). Quality and effective clinical leadership at every stage is needed to improve the delivery of healthcare services and ensure that their safety, teamwork, innovation, and desired outcomes can be reached (Snodgrass et al., 2008). A leader is not a passive organizational instrument. They must be able to convey the shared organizational goals to the employees. Clinical

leadership is expected to blend conventional leadership style with transformational skills so that quality differences in healthcare services can be materialized, and clinical leadership is projected to facilitate evidence-based practices and advancement of patient outcomes via healthcare services (Millward & Bryan, 2005).

As part of clinical leadership, nursing leadership also plays an indispensable role in enhancing the outcomes of healthcare organizations, personnel, and patients (Cummings et al., 2021b). Nursing leadership skills are essential in creating a quality work environment, applying the latest model of healthcare services, presenting health and well-being to all staff, and providing innovative solutions to establish quality nursing and healthcare services (Cummings et al., 2018a). Creative and effective nursing leaders are needed to take the necessary measures to deal with the professionalism of nursing in the future. The stress is reduced when nurses own positive insight into nursing leadership (Cummings et al., 2018b). Numerous studies suggested that nursing leadership practices have a positive relationship with nurses' job satisfaction, health and well-being, and their desire to stay in this area of the profession. They also have significant implications in enhancing the quality of health care service and patients' outcomes (Cummings et al., 2010). Nurse leaders carry out their leadership roles using a particular leadership style as it influences patients, nurses, and the work environment. Systematic review research shows a relationship between leadership styles in improving the quality of the work environment and the achievement of organizational goals (Cummings et al., 2018). Padauleng AW et al. found a meaningful relationship between leadership style and nurse motivation to implement a patient safety culture (Padauleng et al., 2020). The capacity of the head nurse is essential in building and maintaining relationships, supporting the negotiation process and staff cooperation, empathy within conflict resolution, and meeting the needs of staff to be valued and appreciated (Cummings et al., 2018). Landerfelt P. E. et al. stated that the leadership of nurse managers significantly influenced the decrease in the incidence of urinary tract infections due to catheter-associated tract infection by building shelters by creating educated nurses, appropriate staffing, teamwork, and continuous improvement of service quality (Landerfelt et al., 2020).

Servant leadership is one of the leadership styles seen in nursing. Servant leadership has principles and characteristics aligned with nursing values, such as caring, empathy, listening, humility, service, altruism (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), emotional healing, and commitment to the development and well-being of others. Servant leadership enhances staff's personal growth while increasing organizational effectiveness through teamwork, community building, joint decision-making, ethical behaviour, and care following the characteristics of the nursing service system (Kül & Sönmez, 2021). Servant leadership behaviour in nursing is reflected in nursing services that focus on safety, quality, staffing, mentoring nurses and nursing students, assisting staff in doing their jobs and knowing and understanding the perspectives, backgrounds, and values of staff to support teamwork. In addition, nurses use listening skills to find out the needs of patients and families and then advocate for them both when providing services and in forums in the meeting room (Fahlberg & Toomey, 2016). Trastek affirms that servant leadership is the best model to apply in healthcare because it requires alignment between patient care and teamwork. Servant leaders can make changes in healthcare institutions and increase the value of care for patients by aligning duties as professionals with the ethical behaviour of healthcare providers. Servant leadership also focuses on trust and empowerment and can get stakeholders to focus on serving others. This alignment causes health services to have better value and quality and impacts cost efficiency (Trastek et al., 2014). A leader with servant leader qualities will support staff performance and enable them to give their best for the organization and have a vision of uniting staff to achieve the shared goal (Waterman, 2011).

A nurse manager's servant leadership skill positively affects the performance and trust of the staff in the organization. Servant leadership also fulfils the basic psychological needs of the staff, such as autonomy, competence, and interrelationships. Satisfaction over these three basic needs will improve performance and attitude of organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), namely employees' attitude who voluntarily undertake jobs exceeding the standards set for the organization's sustainability in achieving their goals (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Waterman stated that awareness of the aspects of nursing service and adherence to servant leadership principles can harmonize leadership in nursing to create compassionate and understanding services and show that nursing services are part of a caring health workforce. (Waterman, 2011). Many research results state that servant leadership is suitable for nurse application. However, the limited review of articles related to the influence of servant leadership has made the researcher interested in conducting a literature review to describe a fuller picture of the impact of servant leadership on nurses and patients.

Method

This is a literature study, a comprehensive review of the results of previous studies on a particular topic and a synthesizing of the findings. This review examines the evidence in the published literature on the effect of servant leadership in nursing using PICO analysis. The method used uses stages, namely: 1) formulation of research problems, 2) identification of relevant literature, 3) selection of literature, 4) mapping or describing data, and 5) compiling, summarizing, and reporting the results to summarize the research at large. The literature was searched by exploring data based on Science Direct, Proquest, Scopus, Clinicalkey, and SpringerLink, and the words utilized were "Servant Leadership" AND "Patient", AND "Nurse." Inclusion criteria were set to limit the search range to enable the writer to find the desired articles. Those inclusion criteria are: 1) the publication range is ten years, i.e., from 2012-2022; 2) literature in the form of scientific articles resulting from primary research and available in full-text form; 3) quantitative research results are allowed; 4) the subjects of the study are on nurses and patients; and 5) the topic discussed is related to the effects of servant leadership. Articles were selected according to the inclusion criteria and following the topic: servant leadership's influence on nurses and patients.

Data were extracted using a bespoke spreadsheet to record standard information, including title, author, year, aim, method, samples, and findings. Data analysis was carried out to summarize the main conclusions and identify themes. Literature related to ECG criteria for detecting heart problems is analyzed further to fulfil the purpose of this literature review, using PICO analysis as follows: P (problem and patient): nurses and patients (Intervention): servant leadership. (Comparison): nurse managers who apply leadership styles other than servant leadership. O (Outcome): improving the quality of the work environment for nurses, enhancing the quality of health care service, thereby supporting the recovery of patients.

Results

The finding showed that four studies described the impact of servant leadership on particular variables. The selected studies examined the effects of servant leadership on nurses and patients at hospitals. These effects include innovative attitude or behaviour, work performance, organization commitment, nurse satisfaction, reduced bad manners and nurse burnout, and patient satisfaction (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Study findings

No.	Writer & Year	Purposes	Methods	Samples	Findings
1.	Kül & Sönmez, 2021	Identifying the effects of servant leadership on innovative behaviour and job performance	Correlational Study	885 nurses from three hospitals in Turkey	Servant leadership improves nurses' innovative behaviour and job performance.
2.	Neubert et al., 2016	Examining the effects of servant leadership on the nurses' behaviour and the satisfaction	Survey study	1485 nurses and 105 nurse managers from 9 hospitals	A nurse manager with servant leadership qualities is interrelated with the patients' satisfaction
3.	Neubert et al., 2022	Examining the servant leadership characters on the bad manners of the nurses at hospitals	Quantitative study	1.485 nurses of 9 hospital networks in the USA	Negative relationship between servant leadership and nurse incivility
4.	Ma et al., 2022	Examining the roles of servant leadership in reducing nurse burnout	Cross-sectional study	443 nurses working in five public hospitals	Servant leadership decreased the nurses' burnout

Discussion

Servant leadership is a leadership style focusing on mentoring and desiring to help others achieve personal and professional growth (Waterman, 2011) and placing the team members' psychological needs and multidimensional improvement as its main goals (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership enables individuals to enhance personal growth

and increases organizational effectiveness through teamwork, community building, shared decision-making, and ethical and caring behaviour. Servant leadership is appropriate to put into practice in health services, including nursing, as it is in line with professional service values. It is the desire to help and to serve. Servant leadership improves personal and professional development, empowering nurses to perform leadership roles and improving nurse capabilities, satisfaction, and retention (Sturm, 2009). Malak H et al. stated that a nurse manager with quality servant leadership has proven effective in generating service success, creating a positive work environment, and influencing patient outcomes (Malak et al., 2022). Servant leaders in health care enable organizational changes to occur (Trastek et al., 2014), positive impacts on staff behaviour, increased job satisfaction, and growth of organizational profits (Malak et al., 2022).

Kül & Sönmez's study suggests that nurse managers with servant leadership significantly improve nurses' innovative behaviours as these managers would help nurses develop their potential and fulfil their basic psychological needs. It is the autonomy of empowerment and invention of values in the workplace (Liden et al., 2014). Nursing innovation can range from short-term problem solving to address immediate problems to long-term with advanced technologies to improve healthcare service and patient outcomes. Nurses' innovative behaviour needs a supportive atmosphere to grow like the space to speak up about ideas, bring up problems, provide solutions to problems, and contribute to various research. A leader with servant qualities can create a safe environment for his or her staff, and in return, they will hold strong commitment and willingness to innovate, generate innovative ideas, and initiate change (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015). This kind of leader empowers and involves the staff in decision-making, prioritizes their staff to develop their skills, behaves ethically and in manners, and sticks to solid values. Trust becomes the critical factor of servant leadership directly related to the staff's trust in their leaders and organizations.

The effects of servant leadership on innovative behaviour are mediated by intrinsic motivations (Su et al., 2020), job crafting (Khan et al., 2020), autonomy (Bou Reslan et al., 2021), climate for creativity (Karatepe et al., 2020). Intrinsic motivations are the critical factor of innovative behaviour, and the staff with intrinsic motivations would be motivated to pay attention and fulfil what their customers need and actively develop various practicals to solve problems. Therefore, they show innovative behaviours for their services (Su et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Khan et al. stated that job crafting positively affects staff well-being. This increases positive emotions, and the staff, as they have such positivity, can create and implement new ideas as the manifestation of their innovative behaviour. The successful implementation of servant leadership allows organizations to have a climate for creativity and to support innovative management and behaviour fabrication.

Job performance is defined as the behaviour of compliance with the job description defined by the organization. Job performance consists of two elements, namely task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is activities carried out by staff members as decided by the organization, whereas contextual performance is an additional task other than those assigned by the organization. Task performance at hospitals is developing, implementing, and evaluating patient care as planned, while contextual performance is providing additional assistance to patients and their families outside of the job description. (Training, 2020). Nursing job performance reflects the quality of nursing services (Nasurdin & Tan, 2020) and patient outcomes, where the manager's support influences work attachment, and in the end, it will influence job performance. Nurses' performance is affected by several factors at the workplace, one of which is knowledge sharing (Rafique, 2021). Sharing knowledge and ideas assists in completing tasks more effectively. Nurses might share their problems in their daily routines and learn something from their activities. The superior or manager's practical commitment could reduce burnout and look right as the predictor of job performance (Awais et al., 2018).

Liden et al. show three elements to describe how servant leadership affects the staff members' job performance. Firstly, staff empowerment encourages staff's potential to achieve job performance by providing supportive features. Secondly, the leader prioritizes the needs of the staff over his or her personal needs, and the staff will involve themselves in carrying out the tasks effectively. Thirdly, the leader also expresses his or her concern to the community outside the organization; hence, the staff will admire him or her for these extra efforts (Liden et al., 2014). Servant leadership also improves staff performance by engaging and developing them through discovering their potential. Servant leadership behaviour increases the motivation of all staff to work to produce better performance and results. A servant leader's role model influences all staff members' attitudes and behaviours (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership encourages staff members to become leaders; thus, it takes all members to achieve higher performance. A nurse manager with servant leadership qualities significantly improves his or her subordinates' performance by assisting them to elevate competence and triggering positive work behaviours in his or her staff.

Ludwikowska's research found that servant leadership positively affects performance as moderated by employee-oriented human resources policies (Ludwikowska, 2022).

Servant leaders encourage staff performance by increasing their competence and confidence and encouraging all staff to undertake tasks as the organization decides. Servant leaders fulfilling their staff's basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and acceptance, will motivate them to carry out tasks well and engage in OCB (organizational citizenship behaviours). Staff make the manager their role model in carrying out business-oriented behaviour and oral behaviour, as well as developing themselves and demonstrating Job satisfaction, which is a positive affective response to the staff's work situation and working conditions. Job satisfaction is influenced by intrinsic factors such as self-esteem, personal growth, employee achievement, and readiness, extrinsic factors such as fair treatment, the amount of supervision received, and contextual factors related to age and length of service that shape the individual's experience. Al-Asadi et al. stated that the altruistic approach of servant leadership impacts staff's job satisfaction (Al-Asadi et al., 2019).

Nurses' quality of care and job satisfaction are related to leadership styles that positively impact the satisfaction, commitment, and trust of nurses. The leadership style of nurse managers is identified as a significant predictor of nurse job satisfaction (Wong et al., 2020). Servant leadership significantly impacts nurses' job satisfaction by cultivating a shared vision, values, and teamwork and motivating and empowering the staff. Servant leadership increases trust between leaders and subordinates, increasing job satisfaction. Farrington & Lillah's research, conducted on staff at private health cares in South Africa to measure dimensions in servant leadership that influence job satisfaction, states that the dimensions of developing and caring for others influence job satisfaction. (Farrington & Lillah, 2019). Servant leaders spend time, show empathy, and listen to the personal problems of their subordinates (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Leaders who show serious concern and genuine interest in their subordinates build trust and commitment, motivating them to exert more effort in the workplace for their leaders and their organization. Servant leadership displays serving and caring behaviours for the well-being and success of all the staff (Liden et al., 2008), and the willingness to develop their staff's competence influences the nurse's or health workers' job satisfaction the most. The theory of job characteristics supports this argument. By fulfilling the need to grow their staff, the significance of tasks and the meaningfulness of work are improved, which later leads to higher job satisfaction.

Neubert et al.'s research state that servant leadership affects patient satisfaction moderated by nurse satisfaction. Patient outcomes are associated with nursing service satisfaction, pain management satisfaction, and the willingness to recommend care facilities. Servant leadership supports nurses' professional development and improves service quality through interdisciplinary cooperation, decision-making, and ethical behaviour (Neubert et al., 2016). Empathic services affect patient outcomes. Spears identified empathy as a characteristic of servant leadership that means understanding and sharing feelings with others (Spears & Sons, 1996). Nursing servant leaders apply caring to patients while applying care to their staff and focus on the staff's needs in providing health care to patients. The prominent perceived empathy positively affects patient outcomes (Silver & Martin, 2022). By building a virtuous work environment, servant leadership significantly reduces incivility between the nursing staff and nurse superiors. Servant leadership emphasizes virtuous values such as prudence, simplicity, justice, courage, faith, hope, and love, which are all close to the values in servant leadership. The staff will model their servant leader who shows virtues during their services. A work atmosphere filled with virtues has a strengthening effect on staff as observers and recipients of behaviour. Such amplification effects arise from inspiring interdependent relationships, stimulating the emergence of positive behaviours. A good atmosphere strengthens staff to see leaders as their behaviour role models, and in turn, the staff will adjust their behaviour. The excellent atmosphere generated by servant leadership reduces incivility or bad manners while promoting civility through learning and interacting (Ma et al., 2021).

A nurse's burnout can be perceived as emotional fatigue, cynicism, and personal ineffectiveness. A psychologically safe work environment is an essential prerequisite for reducing nurse burnout as psychological safety potentially reduces the risk of failure, rejection, and stress, reducing boredom. Liden et al. stated that the dimensions of servant leadership, namely empowerment, emotional healing, and ethical behaviour, can reduce emotional fatigue (Liden et al., 2008). Job resources provided by servant leaders to reduce nurse burnout are organizational resources (organizational support), positional resources (job clarity), and social resources (supervisor support), among others. Servant leadership empowers and supports staff independence, becomes an emotional healer, and encourages them to behave ethically. Servant leadership provides the resources necessary to address the adverse effects of job demands that lead to burnout and provides staff with the resources they need to recover from burnout (Ma et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The analysis of the articles finds that the head nurse with quality servant leadership plays significant roles in nurses and patients, such as innovative behaviour, job performance, organizational commitment, nurse satisfaction, patient outcomes, reduction of incivility, and lightening the nurse's burnout. This article has some shortcomings as it analyzes only several quantitative articles. Future researchers might further this study by conducting a literature review with more quantitative and qualitative articles.

Author's declaration

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study and took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of results. For manuscript preparation, all the authors read and approved the final version of the paper.

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Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

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