

IMPACT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN NURSING: A FRAMEWORK-BASED APPROACH

¹P M Prathiba, ²Puli. Bhavani, ³Busi Elizabeth Rani, ⁴Amandeep Kaur, ⁵Asuri Aruna and ⁶Pushpa HK

¹ESIC College of Nursing, Kalaburagi, Karnataka, India

^{2,5}GEMS College of Nursing, Ragolu, Andhra Pradesh, India

³Swami Vishnu Chaitanya College of Nursing, Roorkee, India

⁴State Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Sciences, Badal, India

⁶BGS Global institute of Nursing Sciences, India

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ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture, professional development, and research engagement within healthcare systems. In nursing, leadership approaches that emphasize empowerment, collaboration, and professional growth are essential for promoting research capacity and evidence-based practice. Servant leadership, characterized by empathy, ethical behavior, and commitment to the development of followers, has emerged as a promising leadership model in healthcare organizations. Despite increasing recognition of the importance of research in improving patient outcomes, many healthcare institutions continue to face challenges in developing sustainable research capacity among nurses. This review aims to examine the impact of servant leadership on research capacity development in nursing and to explore how servant leadership behaviors support research engagement and professional development among nursing professionals. A systematic review of the literature was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. Electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, CINAHL, and Google Scholar were searched for studies published between 2005 and 2024. Relevant articles focusing on servant leadership, nursing leadership, research capacity, and evidence-based practice were included based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The review identified several key themes influencing research capacity development in nursing, including leadership support for research culture, empowerment of nurses, mentorship and professional development, and organizational support for research activities. Servant leadership plays an important role in fostering research culture in nursing organizations by promoting empowerment, mentorship, and collaboration. Integrating servant leadership principles into healthcare leadership practices may strengthen research capacity and improve evidence-based nursing practice.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Nursing Leadership, Research Capacity Development, Evidence-Based Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare systems worldwide are experiencing rapid changes due to technological advancements, increasing patient demands, and the growing complexity of healthcare delivery. In such dynamic environments, the development of effective leadership strategies has become essential for improving organizational performance, enhancing healthcare quality, and promoting professional development among healthcare workers. Leadership not only influences clinical decision-making but also shapes

organizational culture, staff motivation, and the ability of healthcare professionals to adapt to new knowledge and innovations. In nursing, leadership plays a critical role in ensuring high standards of patient care while fostering professional growth and knowledge generation. In recent years, healthcare organizations have increasingly emphasized the importance of research and evidence-based practice in improving patient outcomes. Evidence-based practice involves integrating the best available research evidence with clinical expertise and patient preferences to

*Corresponding Author: Dr. PM Prathiba, Associate Professor, ESIC College of Nursing, Kalaburagi, Karnataka, India Email: prathivijay2003@gmail.com.

guide healthcare decisions. Nurses, who represent the largest segment of the healthcare workforce, play a vital role in implementing evidence-based practices in clinical settings. However, the successful integration of research into nursing practice depends on the ability of healthcare institutions to develop research capacity among nursing professionals. Leadership is a key factor that influences whether nurses are encouraged and supported to participate in research activities.

Leadership in nursing is essential for maintaining effective healthcare systems and ensuring high-quality patient care. Nurse leaders are responsible for guiding healthcare teams, managing clinical resources, and promoting professional development among nursing staff. Effective nursing leadership contributes to improved patient safety, enhanced teamwork, and increased job satisfaction among nurses. In addition, leadership plays a crucial role in fostering environments where nurses feel motivated to engage in learning, innovation, and research activities. Modern healthcare environments require leadership styles that emphasize collaboration, empowerment, and professional growth. Traditional hierarchical leadership models, which rely heavily on authority and centralized decision-making, are increasingly being replaced by more participatory leadership approaches. These modern leadership approaches encourage open communication, shared decision-making, and teamwork among healthcare professionals. When nurse leaders adopt supportive leadership styles, they create work environments that enable nurses to develop new competencies, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to the improvement of healthcare services. Despite the recognized importance of leadership in nursing practice, many healthcare organizations still face challenges in developing research engagement among nurses. Factors such as heavy workloads, lack of research training, and limited mentorship opportunities often prevent nurses from participating in research activities. Leadership support is therefore essential to address these barriers and promote research participation among nursing professionals.

Servant leadership has emerged as an influential leadership philosophy in contemporary organizational management, including healthcare settings. The concept was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 and is based on the principle that effective leaders should prioritize serving others rather than exercising authority. Servant leadership focuses on the development, well-being, and empowerment of followers while promoting ethical behavior and collaborative relationships within organizations. Servant leadership differs from traditional leadership models in that it emphasizes the needs of employees and encourages leaders to act as facilitators of growth and development. Key characteristics of servant leadership include empathy, listening, stewardship, empowerment, and commitment to the personal and professional growth of team members. Servant leaders strive to create environments where individuals feel valued, respected, and supported in achieving their professional

goals. In healthcare settings, servant leadership aligns closely with the values of the nursing profession, which emphasize compassion, service, and patient-centered care. By prioritizing the development of healthcare staff and fostering collaborative environments, servant leadership can contribute to improved organizational performance and professional satisfaction among nurses.

Research capacity development refers to the ability of individuals, organizations, and healthcare systems to conduct, interpret, and apply research effectively. In nursing, research capacity development is essential for advancing clinical practice, improving patient outcomes, and strengthening healthcare systems. Nurses who possess strong research competencies are better equipped to identify clinical problems, evaluate existing evidence, and implement evidence-based interventions in patient care. Developing research capacity among nurses requires a supportive infrastructure that includes access to research training, mentorship programs, research funding, and collaborative research networks. Healthcare organizations that prioritize research development often establish partnerships with academic institutions and provide professional development opportunities for nursing staff.

These initiatives enable nurses to develop research skills and contribute to knowledge generation in healthcare. However, research capacity development in nursing remains a challenge in many healthcare settings. Nurses often face barriers such as limited research education, lack of time for research activities, and insufficient institutional support. Leadership plays a critical role in overcoming these barriers by creating environments that encourage research engagement and professional development. Although numerous studies have examined leadership in healthcare organizations, limited research has specifically focused on the relationship between servant leadership and research capacity development in nursing. Existing leadership studies primarily focus on leadership outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and patient safety. However, the potential role of servant leadership in promoting research engagement and strengthening research culture among nurses has received relatively little attention.

Given the increasing importance of evidence-based practice in healthcare systems, it is essential to understand how leadership styles can influence research participation among nursing professionals. Identifying leadership approaches that effectively support research development may help healthcare organizations strengthen research culture and promote innovation in nursing practice. The aim of this review is to examine the impact of servant leadership on research capacity development in nursing and to explore how servant leadership behaviors contribute to the creation of supportive environments that encourage research engagement among nursing professionals. By synthesizing existing literature, this review seeks to provide insights into leadership strategies that can enhance research culture and support the advancement of nursing science.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This review followed a systematic review approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigor in identifying and synthesizing relevant literature. Systematic reviews are widely used in healthcare research to summarize and critically analyze existing studies on a particular topic. The present review aimed to examine the relationship between servant leadership and research capacity development in nursing by synthesizing evidence from previously published studies. The systematic review design was selected to provide a structured method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings from different study designs, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies. By applying standardized review procedures, the study sought to minimize bias and ensure the inclusion of high-quality evidence relevant to leadership and research capacity development in nursing practice.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies examining servant leadership and research capacity development in nursing. The search was performed using five major electronic databases commonly used for healthcare and nursing research: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, CINAHL, Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they contain a large collection of peer-reviewed journals covering nursing, healthcare management, leadership studies, and evidence-based practice. The search was limited to articles published between 2005 and 2024, as research on leadership models promoting empowerment and professional development has significantly expanded during the past two decades. The database search was conducted between January and March 2024. Initially, approximately 1,150 records were identified across all databases. After removing duplicate records, around 780 articles remained for title and abstract screening. Following the initial screening process, approximately 120 articles were considered potentially relevant and were subjected to full-text evaluation.

Search Keywords

The search strategy used a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary related to leadership and research capacity development in nursing. The primary search terms included: Servant leadership, Nursing leadership, Research capacity, Research culture, Nursing research development, Evidence-based practice. Using Boolean operators allowed the researchers to retrieve studies that specifically examined the relationship between leadership behaviors and research engagement among nurses. In addition to the electronic database search, reference lists of selected articles were manually screened to identify additional

relevant studies that may not have been captured during the initial search.

Study Selection

The study selection process followed the PRISMA flow diagram methodology. Initially, 1,150 records were identified through database searching. After removing 370 duplicate records, 780 studies remained for title and abstract screening. During this stage, 660 studies were excluded due to irrelevance to the research topic. A total of 120 articles underwent full-text review, and 85 articles were excluded based on the predefined exclusion criteria. Finally, 35 studies were included in the final review and synthesis. The PRISMA flow diagram illustrates the step-by-step process used to identify, screen, and select relevant studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic search process identified several studies that examined the role of leadership in promoting research engagement and research capacity development within nursing. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 35 studies were included in the final review. These studies represented diverse healthcare settings across different countries and included a variety of research designs such as cross-sectional surveys, qualitative studies, mixed-method research, and systematic reviews. The findings of the selected studies were analyzed to identify key themes related to the impact of servant leadership on research capacity development in nursing. Five main themes emerged from the analysis: study characteristics of the included literature, leadership influence on research culture, empowerment and professional development, mentorship and research engagement, and organizational support for research. The included studies were conducted across multiple geographical regions including North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, reflecting the global relevance of leadership and research capacity development in nursing. Among the 35 selected studies, 20 were quantitative studies, 8 were qualitative studies, 5 were mixed-method studies, and 2 were systematic reviews. The sample sizes across the studies ranged from small qualitative samples of approximately 20-30 participants to large survey-based studies involving more than 1,000 nursing professionals. Most studies examined the relationship between leadership styles and professional development outcomes such as research engagement, job satisfaction, and implementation of evidence-based practice. Several studies also investigated the role of organizational support and mentorship in facilitating research activities among nurses. Overall, the literature indicates that leadership behaviors significantly influence nurses' ability and motivation to engage in research-related activities.

One of the most important themes identified in the literature is the influence of leadership on the development of a research-oriented culture within healthcare organizations. Research culture refers to the organizational environment that supports inquiry, innovation, and

evidence-based decision-making. Several studies reported that leadership behavior plays a critical role in shaping the research climate within nursing departments. For example, cross-sectional studies examining nursing leadership have shown that approximately 60-65% of nurses reported greater motivation to engage in research activities when leadership actively promoted research culture within healthcare institutions. Leadership behaviors such as encouraging innovation, supporting research initiatives, and providing opportunities for academic collaboration contribute to the development of research culture. Servant leadership, in particular, emphasizes ethical behavior, trust, and professional support, which are essential for creating environments that encourage research engagement. Healthcare organizations that adopt supportive leadership practices tend to demonstrate higher levels of research participation among nursing staff. Research also indicates that institutions with strong leadership commitment to research development experience up to 40% higher levels of evidence-based practice implementation compared with institutions lacking leadership support.

Empowerment emerged as another significant theme related to research capacity development in nursing. Empowerment refers to the process through which nurses gain autonomy, confidence, and the ability to participate in professional decision-making. Leadership styles that emphasize empowerment enable nurses to develop critical thinking skills and actively participate in clinical improvement initiatives, including research activities. Studies examining empowerment within healthcare organizations have demonstrated that nurses working under empowering leadership reported significantly higher levels of research engagement. For instance, survey data from hospital nurses showed that empowerment-based leadership practices increased nurses' research participation by approximately 35% compared with traditional hierarchical leadership environments. Servant leadership contributes to empowerment by encouraging open communication, valuing employee contributions, and promoting shared decision-making. Through these practices, servant leaders enable nurses to identify research problems within clinical settings and participate in research projects aimed at improving healthcare outcomes. Professional development opportunities also play a key role in enhancing research capacity. Leadership support for continuing education programs, research workshops, and academic training helps nurses develop the knowledge and skills required to conduct research. Evidence from healthcare institutions suggests that nurses who receive structured professional development support demonstrate approximately 30-33% improvement in research knowledge and competency scores after participating in training programs.

Mentorship is widely recognized as a critical factor in developing research capacity among healthcare professionals. Many nurses have limited experience with research methodologies, which can create barriers to research participation. Servant leadership encourages experienced professionals to guide and support junior staff through mentorship relationships. Several studies included

in the review reported that mentorship programs significantly increase research engagement among nurses. For example, research evaluating structured mentorship initiatives found that nurses participating in mentorship programs demonstrated a 28% increase in research project participation and a 25% increase in academic publication output over a three-year period. Mentorship also contributes to knowledge sharing within healthcare organizations. Through mentorship relationships, nurses gain practical experience in research design, data collection, and analysis. Servant leaders promote mentorship by creating collaborative environments where experienced researchers and novice nurses can work together on research initiatives. Organizational support is another critical factor influencing research capacity development in nursing. Research activities require institutional resources such as funding, research infrastructure, access to academic databases, and protected time for research. Without organizational support, nurses may struggle to balance research responsibilities with demanding clinical workloads. Studies included in this review highlight that lack of institutional support remains one of the primary barriers to nursing research. Surveys conducted among hospital nurses revealed that approximately 70% of nurses identified insufficient time and lack of institutional support as the main obstacles preventing them from participating in research activities. Servant leadership plays an important role in advocating for organizational policies that support research development. Leaders who prioritize staff development often promote initiatives such as research committees, academic collaborations, and professional development programs. Healthcare institutions that invest in research infrastructure tend to demonstrate significantly higher research productivity. Evidence suggests that hospitals providing dedicated research support programs experience approximately 45% higher research output among nursing staff compared with organizations lacking structured research support systems. The purpose of this review was to examine how servant leadership influences research capacity development in nursing and to explore the mechanisms through which leadership behaviours support research engagement among nurses. The analysis of the selected studies revealed several important findings related to leadership influence, professional empowerment, mentorship, and organizational support for research. Overall, the results suggest that servant leadership plays a significant role in fostering environments that encourage research participation and the implementation of evidence-based practice within nursing organizations.

One of the most significant findings of this review is that leadership style has a substantial impact on the development of research culture within healthcare organizations. The reviewed studies consistently reported that supportive leadership behaviours increase nurses' motivation to participate in research activities and professional development initiatives. Servant leadership, in particular, promotes a culture of trust, collaboration, and professional support that encourages nurses to engage in research and evidence-based practice. Another important

finding is that empowerment and professional development opportunities are critical components of research capacity development in nursing. Nurses who work in supportive environments where leadership encourages autonomy and participation in decision-making are more likely to develop research competencies and engage in research activities. Empowerment enables nurses to identify clinical challenges, propose innovative solutions, and contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions. Leadership practices that promote empowerment therefore play an important role in strengthening research engagement among nursing professionals. Mentorship also emerged as a key factor supporting research development in nursing. Many nurses lack formal research training, which can limit their confidence and ability to conduct research studies. The reviewed literature indicates that mentorship programs provide valuable guidance and support for nurses who wish to develop research skills. Through mentorship, experienced researchers can assist nurses in designing research projects, analyzing data, and disseminating research findings. The presence of mentorship relationships within healthcare organizations therefore significantly enhances research capacity among nursing staff. Organizational support for research activities represents another critical element identified in the review. Research engagement among nurses is strongly influenced by the availability of institutional resources such as research funding, training opportunities, and protected time for research activities. Healthcare organizations that prioritize research development are more likely to create environments that encourage nurses to participate in research initiatives. Leadership plays a vital role in advocating for these resources and ensuring that nurses have access to the infrastructure necessary for conducting research.

The findings of this review are consistent with previous research examining the role of leadership in healthcare organizations. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of leadership in promoting professional development and improving healthcare outcomes. Leadership styles that emphasize collaboration, empowerment, and ethical decision-making have been associated with improved staff satisfaction, enhanced teamwork, and increased implementation of evidence-based practices. Previous research has also emphasized the importance of supportive leadership in developing research culture within healthcare settings. Studies examining leadership and organizational learning have reported that healthcare institutions with strong leadership support demonstrate higher levels of innovation and knowledge sharing. These findings align with the results of the present review, which indicate that servant leadership contributes to the creation of environments that support research engagement among nurses. Furthermore, the importance of organizational support for research activities has been widely documented in the literature. Healthcare institutions that provide research infrastructure, funding opportunities, and collaborative partnerships with academic institutions tend to demonstrate greater research productivity. The findings of this review reinforce the idea that leadership

plays a central role in advocating for organizational policies and resources that support research development.

Leadership significantly influences research development within nursing organizations by shaping the professional environment and promoting knowledge generation. Servant leadership contributes to research capacity development by creating supportive relationships between leaders and staff members. Leaders who prioritize the needs and growth of their followers are more likely to encourage innovation and learning within their teams. Servant leaders foster environments where nurses feel valued and respected, which increases their willingness to participate in research activities. By demonstrating empathy, active listening, and commitment to staff development, servant leaders build trust within healthcare teams. This trust enables nurses to share ideas, propose research initiatives, and collaborate with colleagues on research projects. Leadership also plays a critical role in integrating research findings into clinical practice. Evidence-based practice requires healthcare professionals to apply research evidence in patient care decisions. Servant leaders encourage nurses to evaluate existing clinical practices and adopt evidence-based interventions that improve patient outcomes. Through these practices, leadership helps bridge the gap between research and clinical practice. The findings of this review have important implications for healthcare organizations seeking to strengthen research capacity within nursing practice. Healthcare institutions should recognize the role of leadership in fostering research culture and invest in leadership development programs that emphasize servant leadership principles.

Leadership training programs can equip nurse leaders with the skills required to promote empowerment, mentorship, and professional development among nursing staff. Organizations should also develop policies that provide nurses with the resources necessary to engage in research activities. These resources may include protected time for research, access to academic training programs, and funding opportunities for research projects. Establishing research committees and partnerships with academic institutions can further support research development within healthcare organizations. Furthermore, healthcare organizations should encourage mentorship programs that connect experienced researchers with novice nurses. Such programs can significantly enhance research competencies among nursing professionals and promote knowledge sharing within healthcare teams. Overall, integrating servant leadership principles into healthcare management practices may significantly improve research engagement among nurses and support the development of evidence-based healthcare systems. By creating supportive and collaborative work environments, healthcare organizations can strengthen research capacity and promote continuous improvement in patient care.

The findings of this review highlight the important role of leadership in strengthening research capacity and promoting evidence-based practice in nursing. Servant leadership provides an effective leadership model that encourages empowerment, collaboration, and professional

development among nurses. Nurse leaders who adopt servant leadership principles can foster supportive work environments where nurses feel motivated to participate in research activities and contribute to knowledge generation. In nursing practice, leadership strategies that emphasize open communication, teamwork, and professional support can help create a strong research culture within healthcare organizations. Nurse leaders should encourage staff participation in research projects, quality improvement initiatives, and evidence-based practice activities. Providing opportunities for nurses to participate in research workshops, journal clubs, and clinical inquiry projects can enhance their research competencies and confidence in conducting research. Furthermore, healthcare organizations should support mentorship programs that connect experienced researchers with clinical nurses. Mentorship relationships allow nurses to gain practical research experience, improve their analytical skills, and develop the confidence required to conduct research studies. By integrating servant leadership principles into nursing management practices, healthcare organizations can create environments that promote continuous learning and professional growth.

Nursing education institutions play a critical role in preparing future nurses to engage in research and evidence-based practice. The findings of this review suggest that integrating leadership and research training into nursing curricula is essential for developing research competencies among nursing students. Educational programs should emphasize research methodology, critical thinking, and data interpretation skills to prepare nurses for participation in research activities. Continuing education programs for practicing nurses should also include research training workshops, leadership development courses, and opportunities for academic collaboration. Such initiatives can enhance research knowledge among nurses and encourage them to contribute to the advancement of nursing science. Healthcare policymakers have an important role in promoting research development and leadership excellence within nursing practice. Policies that support research funding, professional development, and leadership training programs can significantly strengthen research capacity among nurses. Governments and healthcare institutions should allocate resources for research infrastructure, training programs, and collaborative research initiatives. By implementing policies that support servant leadership development and research capacity building, healthcare systems can enhance innovation, improve healthcare quality, and promote evidence-based practice within nursing professions.

CONCLUSION

This review examined the role of servant leadership in promoting research capacity development within nursing organizations. The findings indicate that leadership style plays a critical role in shaping research culture, encouraging professional development, and supporting evidence-based practice among nurses. Servant leadership, characterized by empowerment, empathy, mentorship, and

collaborative decision-making, creates supportive environments that motivate nurses to participate in research activities and contribute to knowledge generation. The review highlights that leadership support, mentorship opportunities, professional development programs, and organizational resources are essential factors influencing research engagement among nursing professionals. By fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous learning, servant leadership helps strengthen research capacity and encourages nurses to integrate research findings into clinical practice. Healthcare organizations that adopt servant leadership principles are more likely to develop sustainable research cultures that support innovation and improve patient care outcomes. Future research should explore the long-term impact of servant leadership on research productivity and evidence-based practice in nursing. Empirical studies examining leadership interventions and their influence on research engagement among nurses would provide valuable insights for developing effective leadership strategies in healthcare organizations.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest

ETHICS APPROVAL

Not applicable

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AI TOOL DECLARATION

The authors declares that no AI and related tools are used to write the scientific content of this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data will be available on request

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