

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Young Nurse Leaders on the Leadership Styles and Strategic Management Approaches: Basis for Leadership and Management Program

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the experiences of the younger generation of nurse leaders regarding their leadership positions, leadership approaches, and strategic management techniques in a primary hospital environment. This involved examining the difficulties experienced by younger nurse leaders, the leadership techniques used by these nurse leaders, and the strategies adopted in handling healthcare duties, as well as staff and patient management. This research sought to provide a deeper insight into the ability of younger nurse leaders to handle leadership duties in spite of having less experience. A qualitative descriptive research design was used for this research, anchored on the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. A total of nine (9) young nurse leaders participated in this study, and their selection was done using purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria. Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews to obtain a more comprehensive description of the respondents' experiences, views, and management approaches. Thematic analysis using the Kelly Grid was conducted to analyze the data collected. Five themes were identified from the findings: Leadership Identity Development, Collaborative Leadership Behaviors, Operational Management of Patient Care, Professional Trust Building, and Emotional Leadership and Resilience. The participants faced difficulties regarding workload pressures, decision-making, communication, and interactions with more experienced nurses. However, participants displayed collaborative, democratic, and transformational leadership behaviors. Strategies for effective management included delegation, prioritization, communication, collaboration, and efficient resource allocation, which helped sustain quality patient care and operational effectiveness. The findings suggest that early exposure to leadership, mentorship, and organizational support is vital in building leadership skills and resilience among young nurses.

Keywords: Young nurse leaders, leadership styles, strategic management, nursing leadership, lived experiences, qualitative descriptive research

INTRODUCTION

It is important for the provision of quality patient care and effective healthcare management to have strong leadership among nurses. Despite having limited experience, young nurse leaders are often given leadership positions that assist them in establishing their leadership identity and management abilities (Cummings et al., 2021). However, they frequently encounter obstacles in decision-making, staff management, communication, stress management, and administrative duties (Nurs Rep et al., 2024; BMC Nursing et al., 2024). These experiences influence their leadership styles and approaches. This study examines their experiences and highlights five major themes: Leadership Identity Development, Collaborative

Leadership Practices, Operational Care Management, Professional Trust-Building, and Emotional Leadership & Resilience

Statement of the Problem

The study is guided by the research question: How do young nurse leaders navigate leadership challenges, implement strategic management approaches, and shape their leadership styles to drive effective nursing practice and healthcare improvement?

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. Examine the leadership challenges that young nurse leaders face in their early leadership roles, and how they respond to these challenges.
2. Explore how young nurse leaders apply strategic management concepts in healthcare settings.
3. Understand how young nurse leaders establish and mold their leadership styles, and their perceived impact on nursing practice and healthcare results.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included young nurse leaders aged 20-30 who held official leadership roles or supervisory posts within hospitals, such as heads of nursing services, charge nurses, or nurse supervisors. These young nurse leaders' experiences and perceptions were evaluated in relation to the organizations in which they worked, and each organization was characterized by distinct structures and management styles. Consequently, the results cannot be generalized to all other nurse leaders working in other settings, such as community or private clinics.

Review of Related Literature

Leadership and strategic management are important for delivering quality patient care and for creating effective organizations and productive work environments. Transformational leadership styles have a positive impact on nurses' motivation and the quality of the care they provide (Mushtaq & Hussain, 2021; Babaei & Friege, 2023; Harb et al., 2022). Other leadership styles, such as transactional, authentic, and servant leadership, can promote teamwork, quality care, and professional growth and practice (Specchia et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019; Alilyyani et al., 2022). Strategic management involves planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating health care services. Through strategic management, young nurse leaders can facilitate health care services to meet changing demands (Kwon et al., 2022; Thompson & Glasø, 2023; Alshahrani, 2022). However, young nurse leaders face many challenges. These challenges include the transitional nature of leadership, workplace stress, staffing issues in the hospital, and intergenerational conflicts. To overcome these challenges, young leaders must possess qualities such as resilience, emotional intelligence, and a commitment to continuing professional development (Kim & Lee, 2023; American Organization for Nursing Leadership Insight Study, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the theoretical frameworks of Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and Strategic Management Theory (Drucker, 1954). The study took a constructivist–interpretivist approach and explored the leadership experiences of young nurse leaders and how these experiences may be influenced by workplace challenges in terms of how they constructed their leadership identity, enhanced their management skills, and developed their resilience.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines how the leadership development of young nurse leaders can be influenced by their experiences of transitioning into their first leadership roles, the difficulties that they face, the role that these experiences play in their leadership development through acquisition of new knowledge, skills and competence, which in turn enhances their leadership and leads to their professional growth and enhanced nursing practice and care within the health care system. This conceptual framework is based upon the constructivist–interpretivist approach of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative descriptive research design, which aimed to understand the leadership experiences and problems, as well as the process of becoming a leader, among young nurse leaders working in hospitals. The use of this design helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of participants' subjective perspectives on their leadership style, management strategies, and approaches to handling problems at work.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and understand the experiences of young nurse leaders regarding their leadership styles and strategic management approaches in clinical settings.

Research Steps

The study followed a systematic qualitative process that began with the identification of the research problem and a review of related literature to establish its theoretical and conceptual foundation. Based on the identified gaps, the conceptual framework, methodology, and interview guide were developed to guide data collection. The gathered data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which identifies patterns and emerging themes. Findings were interpreted in relation to relevant leadership theories, leading to conclusions and recommendations. Overall, the study followed a cyclical process typical of qualitative research.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in leadership positions. Inclusion criteria were at least one year in a leadership role and active involvement in decision-making, while temporary roles and roles without supervisory responsibilities were excluded. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with one main question and follow-up probes. Interviews were conducted in a private setting, recorded, and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

The research instruments were validated by a panel of three experts: a Nursing Professor, an Academic Coordinator, and a College Dean with expertise in leadership and management, to ensure the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of the interview questions and reflective journal for clarity, relevance, and consistency with the study objectives and theoretical framework. The instruments were modified to improve quality and effectiveness based on feedback received.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

As with any qualitative research, the study is not generalizable to other groups of people or settings. The study cannot be generalized, as it was conducted with young nurse leaders in a primary hospital and relied on self-reported experiences and the researcher's interpretation. Ethical standards were strictly followed, and approval was obtained from the hospital authorities. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy were guaranteed, and participants were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP 1. How do young nurse leaders navigate leadership challenges, implement strategic management approaches, and shape their leadership styles to drive effective nursing practice and healthcare improvement?

Leadership Identity Development, Collaborative Leadership Practices, Operational Care Management, Professional Trust-Building and Emotional Leadership and Resilience. Young nurse leaders develop their leadership identity and practice through their experiences and begin to demonstrate confidence in leading, developing teamwork and managing care. The study found that leadership competencies could be developed through a number of routes, including experience, collaboration, strategy management, and the leader's ability to cope with the pressures of the role. In summary, the study found that the experiences of the young nurse leaders studied had a significant impact on the way that they led and managed in health care.

SUMMARY

This study explores young nurse leaders' experiences with their leadership styles and strategic management within healthcare organizations. Five themes emerged: Leadership Identity Development, Collaborative Leadership Practices, Operational Care Management, Professional Trust-Building, and Emotional Leadership and Resilience. Findings reveal how leadership competency evolves through workplace learning, collaboration, decision-making, and overcoming adversity.

CONCLUSIONS

Young nurse leaders experience both challenges and opportunities that shape their leadership identity, collaboration, operational management, trust-building, and emotional resilience. We highlight the importance of organizational support, mentorship, and leadership training to further develop them. This suggests that leadership is no longer an exclusive domain of seniors but is increasingly evident among young nurse leaders, who now shoulder critical responsibilities in health care settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Leadership development programs, with structured elements, mentoring, and ongoing education, need to be embedded within organizations to support the transition of young leaders into leadership roles in healthcare. **Nursing administrators** can foster work environments that encourage collaboration. **Young nurse leaders** can develop their leadership competencies and

strengthen their ability to address challenges through leadership training, participation in professional development activities, engagement, and self-reflection. **Nursing educators** need to solidify the content of leadership and management in nursing education to equip future nurses to meet their potential leadership roles. **Future research** could replicate this study in other health care organizations and with larger samples of young nurse leaders to explore their experiences in greater depth and to verify the findings of this study.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

This article was created with the help of AI-assisted tools for grammar and structure. No data were collected, analyzed, or interpreted using any AI tools; all authors contributed academically.

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