

From Recognition to Engagement: Appreciative Leadership as a Catalyst for Work Engagement among Staff Nurses

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ABSTRACT

Background: Appreciative leadership is recognized as one of the most effective leadership styles in fostering a supportive work environment and enhancing staff engagement, particularly in healthcare settings. It emphasizes trust, communication, and recognizing the contributions of team members, all of which play a critical role in improving nurse performance and patient care outcomes. **Aim:** This study aimed to assess the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses. **Research Design:** A descriptive correlational research design was utilized in this study. **Setting:** The study was conducted at Andalusia Maadi Hospital, Cairo, Egypt. **Sample:** A convenience sample of 120 staff nurses working in various departments and providing direct patient care was included in the study. **Tools:** Two tools were used in the data collection process: the Appreciative Leadership scale and the Work Engagement Scale. **Results:** The study revealed that more than half of the studied staff nurses perceived a high level of appreciative leadership in their managers (78.3%), and also the majority of them demonstrated a high level of work engagement (83.3%). **Conclusion:** The current study concluded that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses. **Recommendations:** In the light of study findings, the researcher recommended that hospitals should establish recognition systems that formally acknowledge nurses' efforts and achievements to boost morale and engagement.

Keywords: *Appreciative Leadership, Staff Nurses, and Work Engagement.*

Introduction

Leadership is the key element in the progress of increasing healthcare organizational productivity. Healthcare organizations require diverse leadership styles to work effectively to improve the healthcare sector, trusting in qualified leaders who can think differently and dynamically. Effective leadership in the healthcare sector is essential to improve and enhance systems' effectiveness. Leadership has a vigorous role in the quality of nursing care in hospitals, patient safety, and cost-effectiveness, in line with a shared organizational vision, mission, governance, and empowerment (*Al-Thawabiya, et al, 2023*).

Appreciative leadership is a positive mental model and framework for leadership practices that are an expression of the response to complexity. Practically, the appreciative leader

understands that every person in an organization plays a specific and definitive role in the system's/ network's ability to thrive. Everyone's role is appreciative in that it's consciously and concretely related to the life of the work community. No role is superfluous; it's either adding value or taking it away. We know a role's value by the degree of goodness-of-fit between the role and its specific contribution to the dynamic and prospering life of the work community. The leader's role is appreciative to the extent that it enables and advances the role contribution of everyone who participates in the life of the work community, adding value to the system/network. (Grady, and Malloch, 2021).

Appreciative leadership increases employee motivation, job satisfaction, and loyalty to the organization. In addition, employing effective leadership styles such as appreciative leadership could address various challenges related to employee work engagement in healthcare organizations. Appreciative leadership is the most important part of effective leadership because it improves patient safety and employee engagement by building trust and healthy work environments. (Assi, et al, 2024).

Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and resilience in work. Dedication is characterized by strong involvement in one's work as well as a sense of significance and enthusiasm. Absorption is a state of being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work (Amano et al., 2020).

Work engagement is the engagement of the employee towards his or her work. Work engagement is operationalized as a positive work-related perspective and is portrayed by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor represents a high level of energy and mental strength while working; dedication refers to experiencing a feeling of essentialness, enthusiasm, and challenge; and absorption is portrayed by being engaged and absorbed in work. (Memon et al., 2019).

Appreciative Leadership has a significant factor in enhancing work engagement among nurses by fostering a positive, empowering work environment. when leaders demonstrate appreciation, recognize strengths, and support professional growth, nurses are more likely to exhibit higher levels of energy, dedication, and involvement in their work. There is a positive association between appreciative management and work engagement among health and social care professionals, particularly influencing the vigor component of engagement. (Kuha, et al, 2024).

Significance of the study:

Nurses' opinions regarding appreciative leadership may enhance work engagement and thus enhance organizational productivity and raise the quality of care (Thanh et al., 2022). Work engagement is an important sign of satisfaction with the organization and the nurses' leaders. As such, the level of engagement has a close relation to work results. Staff appreciation of the working environment implies their trust and credit for the organization and leaders, dedication to the highest level of responsibility, and innovation. Leadership effects are meaningful with work engagement. (Eliyana et al., 2019).

Mousa et al., 2019 reported that about 75.09 % of non-engaged nurses were guided by low appreciation from their leaders. Engaged nurses are better able to cope with work difficulties and demands.

The significance of the study is coming from the importance of appreciative leadership and work engagement for stability and development of all organizations to build nurses engagement and motive them, so this study was done to assess the relationship between appreciative leadership

and work engagement among staff nurses and show how nurses' leaders can affect the nurses work engagement through appreciative leadership that improves the work quality and achieves the organizational goals which impact positively in the performance of nurses in healthcare setting.

Aim of the study

This study aimed to assess the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses through the following objectives: -

1. Assess appreciative leadership as perceived by staff nurses.
2. Determine the level of work engagement among staff nurses.
3. Explore the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses.

Research question:

What is the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses?

Subjects and Methods

Research Design:

A descriptive correlational research design was used in this study.

Research Setting:

The study was conducted at the Andalusia Maadi Hospital, which is considered one of the private sector hospitals in Cairo Governorate, Egypt.

Subjects:

The study subjects included all available staff nurses at the study setting during the time of data collection and agreed to participate in the study (**n=120**).

Sampling:

A convenience sample of staff nurses at the time of the study who were accepted to participate in the study (**n=120**).

Inclusion criteria

All available staff nurses who had more than one year of work experience and had agreed to participate in the study were included.

Tool for data collection:

In order to fulfill the aim of the study, two tools were used for data collection.

First tool: Appreciative Leadership Scale

It consisted of two parts:

Part 1: Personal Data of the Participants.

(Age, gender, hospital department, educational qualifications, and years of experience).

Part 2: Appreciative Leadership Scale

This tool was a self-administered scale and was developed by (*Whitney et al, 2012*) and validated with (*Harmoinen, et al, 2023*) and was modified by the researcher based on literature review (*Altwirgy, et al, 2022*). It consisted of five dimensions: (a) Integrity (8 items), (b) Inquiry (6 items), (c) Inclusion (7 items), (d) Inspiration (12 items), and (e). Illumination (7 items).

Responses:

Responses for scale items were measured based on 3-point likert scale as (1) Disagree, (2) Neutral, (3) Agree.

Scoring system.

This tool consisted of (40 items) with a total grade (120). According to the mentioned reference, subject responses were calculated in the scoring system and classified into:

- Low level: (40 - ≥ 72) < 60%
- Moderate level: (< 72 - ≥ 90) $\geq 60\%$ to 75%
- High level: (< 90 - ≥ 120) > 75%

2nd tool: Work Engagement Scale (WES)

This tool was a self-administered scale and was developed by (*Wilmar, et al, 2004*), and was modified by the researcher based on literature review (*Domínguez-Salas, et al, 2022*). It consisted of six dimensions: (a) Vigor (6 items), (b) Dedication (5 items) (c) Absorption (6 items), (d) Physical engagement (6 items), (e) Emotional engagement (5 items), and (f) Cognitive engagement (6 items).

Responses:

Responses for scale items were measured based on 3-point likert scale as (1) Disagree, (2) Neutral, (3) Agree.

Scoring system.

This tool consisted of (34 items) with a total grade (102). According to the mentioned reference, subject responses were calculated in the scoring system and classified into:

- Low level: (34 - ≥ 61).
- Moderate level: (< 61 - ≥ 77).
- High level: (< 77 - ≥ 102).

Validity:

The tools were formulated, translated into Arabic, and submitted to five experts in the field of nursing administration from three different universities (Cairo, Ain Shams, Menoufia, and Helwan) to test their content validity through an opinionnaire sheet; accordingly, the necessary modifications were made.

Reliability:

Reliability for the utilized tools was tested to determine the extent to which the items of the tools are intercorrelated with each other. The Cronbach's alpha model is one of the most popular reliability statistics in use today and is considered a model of internal consistency that is used to estimate the reliability of test scores. The statistical equation of Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0-1 (*Malkewitz et al., 2023*). The value of Cronbach's alpha for the leadership scale was 0.971, and for work engagement was 0.965.

Ethical Considerations:

An official approval to conduct the proposed study was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Nursing, Helwan University. Participation in the study is voluntary, and subjects will be given complete information about the study and their role before taking the informed consent. The ethical considerations will include explaining the purpose and nature of the study, stating the possibility to withdraw at any time, confidentiality of the information, and that it will not be accessed by any other part without taking permission of the participants. Ethics, values, culture, and beliefs will be respected.

Operational Design

It included preparatory phase, validity, reliability, pilot study and field work, and ethical considerations.

Preparatory phase:

It included reviewing past, current, national, and international related literature and theoretical knowledge of various aspects of the study using books, articles, the internet, periodicals, and magazines.

Pilot study:

The pilot study was done on 10% (**12 staff nurses**) of the total sample size (**120 staff nurses**) to examine the clarity of questions and the time needed to complete the study tools. Based on the results. Subjects included in the pilot study were included in the study because no modifications were made.

Field work:

The researcher obtained approval from the director of Andalusia Maadi hospital and took formal consent from each study subject before data collection. the researcher went to Andalusia Maadi hospital 6 days/ week (for 8 hours/day) from (8:00 AM to 4:00 pm) and collected data by himself through meeting each hospital nursing staff member, explaining the aim of the study and the method of filling out the questionnaire. He was present all the time during fulfilling the study tools to answer any questions. The time needed to complete the first tool ranged between (10-15) minutes, and the second tool ranged between (15-20) minutes. The researcher checks the completeness of each filled sheet to ensure the absence of any missing data.

Administrative design:

Approval was obtained through a letter issued by the Dean of the Faculty of Nursing, Helwan University, and explaining the aim and objective of this study to the director of Andalusia Maadi hospital.

Statistical design:

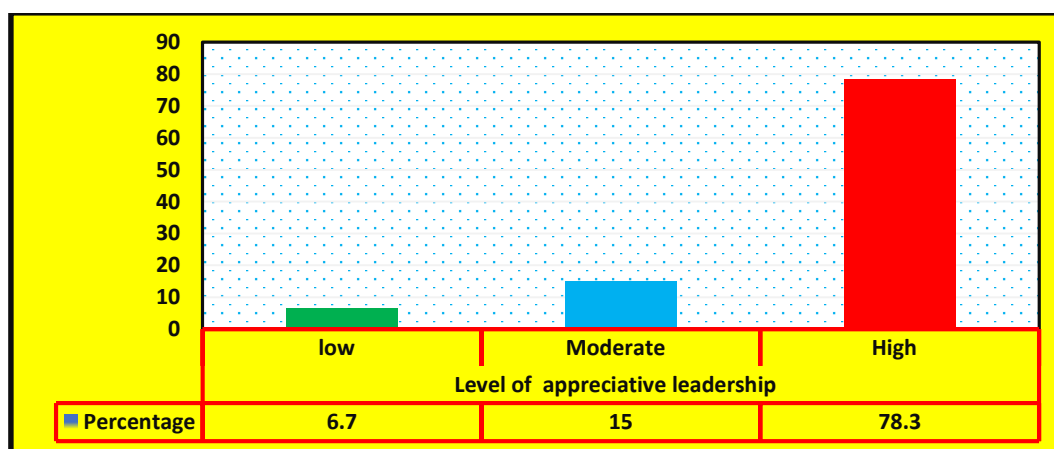
Data entry and analysis were performed using the SPSS statistical package version 26. Categorical variables were expressed as numbers and percentage, while continuous variables were expressed as (mean \pm SD). Weigh mean is used to rank dimensions of appreciative leadership and work engagement when their total score is not equal.

Results

Table (1): Frequency distribution of the studied staff nurses regarding their personal characteristics (n= 120)

Personal characteristics		n	%
Age in years	20 < 30 years	48	40.0
	30 < 40 years	62	51.7
	40 < 50 years	8	6.7
	50 ≤ 60 years	2	1.7
	Mean ± SD	32.71 ± 6.6	
	Rang:(Max-Min)	28: (52-24)	
Years of experience	>1 < 5 years	38	31.7
	5 < 10 years	45	37.5
	10 < 20 years	35	29.2
	≥ 20 years	2	1.7
	Mean ± SD	9.50± 5.21	
	Rang:(Max-Min)_	27: (31-4)	
Nursing qualification	Diploma nurse	4	3.3
	Technical institute	20	16.7
	Bachelor	72	60.0
	Master	24	20.0
	Doctorate	0	0.0
Gender	Male	55	45.8%
	Female	65	54.2%

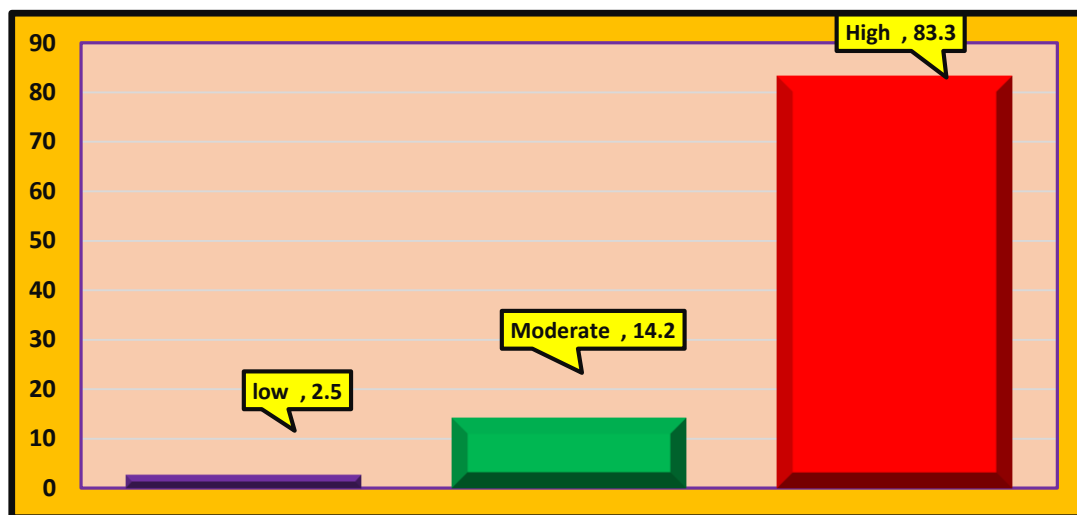
Table (1) describes that more than half (**51.7%**) of age's the studied staff nurses ranged from 30 < 40 years with a total mean of (**32.71 ± 6.6**). Moreover, it shows that about more than half of them (54.2%) were females and three-fifths (**60%**) of them were holding a previous qualification of a bachelor's degree and more than one-third (37.5%) working for > 5 < 10 years with a total mean of (**9.50± 5.21**) respectively.



$$\chi^2=110, P= 0.000^{**}$$

Figure (1): Percentage distribution of level of appreciative leadership among the studied staff nurses (n= 120)

Fig (1) illustrates the level of appreciative leadership among the studied staff nurses. It describes that more than three-quarters (**78.3%**) of the studied staff nurses have a high level of appreciative leadership, while a minority (**6.7%**) of them have a low level. In addition to, presence of a highly statistically significant difference between the level of appreciative leadership among the studied staff nurses.



$$\chi^2=137, P= 0.000^{**}$$

Figure (2): Percentage distribution of the level of work engagement dimension among the studied staff nurses (n= 120)

Fig (2) illustrates the level of work engagement among the studied staff nurses. It describes that more than three-quarters (**83.3%**) of the studied staff nurses have a high level of appreciative leadership, while a minority (**2.5%**) of them have a low level. In addition to, presence of a highly statistically significant difference between the level of work engagement among the studied staff nurses.

Table (2): Relation between level of appreciative leadership and level of work engagement among the studied staff nurses (n= 120)

Level of work engagement:	No.	Level of appreciative leadership						χ^2	P-Value
		Agree		Disagree		Natural			
		8	6.7	18	15.0	94	78.3		
		No	%	No	%	No	%		
▪ Low	3	3	2.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	118	0.00 0**
▪ Moderate	17	5	4.2	12	10.0	0	0.0		
▪ High	100	0	0.0	6	5.0	94	78.3		

*Significant $p \leq 0.05$

**Highly significant $p \leq 0.01$

Table (2): represents that there was a highly statistically significant relation between the level of appreciative leadership and the level of work engagement among the studied staff nurses.

Table (3): Correlation between the dimensions of appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses (n= 120)

Work engagement		Appreciative leadership				
		Integrity	Inquiry	Inclusion	Inspiration	Illumination
Vigor	R	0.974	0.989	0.983	0.984	0.984
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Dedication	R	0.977	0.968	0.975	0.969	0.971
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Absorption	R	0.969	0.956	0.956	0.965	0.975
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Physical	R	0.934	0.930	0.956	0.944	0.935
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Emotional	R	0.964	0.971	0.966	0.965	0.975
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Cognitive	R	0.932	0.930	0.949	0.947	0.931
	P	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**

*Significant $p \leq 0.05$

**Highly significant $p \leq 0.01$

Table (2): describes there was a highly statistically significant positive strong correlation between dimension of appreciative leadership (integrity, inquiry, inclusion, inspiration and illumination) and work engagement dimension (vigor, dedication, absorption, physical, emotional and cognitive) among the studied staff nurses at r ranged from 0.930 to 0.984 & $P = 0.000$.



Figure (3): Scatter dot correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses (n= 120)

Fig (3): it describes scatter dot correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses. It illustrates that there was a highly statistically significant positive strong correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses at $r = 0.995$ & $P = 0.000$.

Discussion

Appreciative leadership is essential in fostering a positive work culture and enhancing engagement among nursing staff, particularly in high-stress healthcare environments. While its implementation requires intentional effort, it can significantly improve morale and collaboration. To maximize its effectiveness, leaders must model appreciation, encourage strength-based feedback, and promote open dialogue that values every team member's contribution. Establishing a culture where appreciation is a norm not an exception can lead to greater job satisfaction, professional development, and improved patient care outcomes. (Wong *et al.*, 2022).

The ongoing study revealed that three-fifths hold a bachelor's degree, and more than one-third had worked for $>5 < 10$ years, and the Technical Institute of Nursing of the studied staff nurses at both selected hospitals. The study was in same line with (Mohamed *et al.* 2022), in the study title "The role of demographic characteristics in influencing nurses' engagement and performance" who reported that demographic characteristics influence nurses' engagement and performance. The majority of participants were in the age group of 30 to 40 years and held bachelor's degrees. Also showed that 51.7% of the studied nurses fell within the same age range and 60% held a bachelor's degree. This suggests a trend of highly educated and relatively young nursing staff, which may contribute positively to organizational involvement.

This result was in agreement with (Farag *et al.* 2021) in the study title "The impact of moderate nursing experience on clinical performance and professional engagement," who emphasized that nurses with moderate experience typically demonstrate improved critical thinking skills, greater autonomy, and stronger engagement in their clinical roles. This level of experience also allows nurses to serve as role models for junior staff, thereby positively influencing team performance.

This result was in disagreement with (Khalil *et al.* 2020) in the study titled, "The relationship between nursing experience and clinical engagement: Rethinking assumptions," which reported that years of experience were not significantly associated with higher levels of engagement or improved clinical performance among nurses.

The current study described that less than one-tenth and more than three-quarters of the studied staff nurses at selected hospital perceived a high level of appreciative leadership, with a highly statistically significant difference.

This result was agreed with (Ali *et al.* 2022) in the study titled "Appreciative Leadership and Nurse Performance in Egyptian Hospitals", who reported that more than two-thirds of the studied nurses perceived high levels of appreciative leadership, while about one-fifth of them had a moderate level and a small minority perceived low level respectively

This result was disagreed with (Johnson *et al.*, 2022) in the study titled, "Appreciative Leadership Practices among Nurse Managers in Public Hospitals in Canada", who reported that the majority of the studied nurses perceived only moderate levels of appreciative leadership, and a noticeable percentage reported low levels, indicating a need for leadership development programs to enhance supportive leadership behaviors.

The current study described that more than one-third and about two-thirds of the studied staff nurses at Andalusia Maadi Hospital perceived moderate and high levels of work engagement, respectively, with a highly statistically significant difference

This result was in the same line with (*Alharbi et al., 2022*) in the study titled, “The relationship between nurses’ work engagement and organizational commitment in Saudi Arabia,” who reported that nurses who experienced higher levels of engagement showed stronger professional commitment and better performance outcomes, particularly in hospitals with supportive leadership and adequate staffing.

This result is in agreement with (*Chen et al., 2020*) in the study titled, “The impact of work environment and leadership support on nurses’ work engagement in Chinese tertiary hospitals,” who reported that there were statistically significant differences in the total mean scores of work engagement among nurses based on variations in perceived leadership support and work environment conditions.

This result was disagreed with (*Ahmed et al., 2022*) in the study titled, “Exploring the relationship between nurse engagement and burnout in public hospitals of Pakistan,” who reported that the majority of the studied nurses exhibited low levels of work engagement and high levels of emotional exhaustion, indicating poor organizational support and lack of motivational leadership in their hospital settings.

The current study showed a relation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses. It represents that there was a highly statistically significant positive relation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses.

Regarding the researcher’s point of view, the results support the idea that appreciative leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing work engagement among staff nurses. However, it is important to recognize that this relationship may not be entirely causal. Other contributing factors, such as the overall work climate, individual motivation, team dynamics, and organizational support systems, might also influence the level of engagement. Therefore, fostering a culture of appreciation should be part of a broader strategy to improve employee commitment and performance.

This result is in agreement with (*Negussie, et al., 2021*) in the study titled, “Relationship between leadership styles and nurses’ work engagement in public hospitals in Ethiopia,” who reported that there were statistically significant differences between the total mean scores of work engagement among nurses based on their perception of leadership style. The study confirmed that supportive and appreciative leadership had a direct positive impact on nurses’ motivation, involvement, and commitment at work.

This result was disagreed with (*Mohammed et al., 2022*) in the study titled, “The influence of leadership style on nurses’ motivation and engagement in emergency units in Sudan,” who reported that there was no statistically significant relationship between leadership style and nurses’ work engagement. The study concluded that other factors, such as workload, emotional exhaustion, and lack of resources, had a more dominant effect on engagement levels than leadership appreciation.

The current study described that there was a highly statistically significant positive strong correlation between all dimensions of appreciative leadership (integrity, inquiry, inclusion, inspiration, and illumination) and all dimensions of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption, physical, emotional, and cognitive) among the studied staff nurses.

Regarding the researcher’s point of view, the results suggest that appreciative leadership significantly enhances work engagement among staff nurses. However, this relationship might be influenced by other

factors such as work environment, individual differences, and organizational support, which should be taken into account.

This result is in agreement with (*Saleh et al., 2022*) in the study titled, “Appreciative leadership and its effect on nurses’ work engagement in tertiary care hospitals in Saudi Arabia,” who reported that nurses who perceived higher levels of appreciative leadership demonstrated significantly higher levels of engagement across all dimensions. The study concluded that leadership practices based on recognition, inclusion, and support were essential to promoting motivation and job involvement among nursing staff.

This result was disagreed with (*Rana et al., 2023*) in the study titled, “Leadership style and nurse engagement: A study in overcrowded public hospitals in Bangladesh,” who reported that there was no statistically significant relationship between leadership appreciation and nurses’ work engagement. The study revealed that high workload, lack of resources, and emotional exhaustion were more dominant factors negatively affecting engagement, regardless of leadership behavior.

Concerning the scatter dot between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses, the current study illustrated that there was a highly statistically significant strong positive correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among the studied staff nurses.

Researcher’s point of view, thinking that the strong positive correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement shows that when leaders use appreciation and support, nurses become more motivated and engaged in their work. This means that appreciative leadership can be an effective way to improve nurses’ performance and commitment in the hospital.

On the same line with (*Lopez et al., 2022*) in the study titled, “The impact of appreciative leadership on nurse engagement and retention in public hospitals in Chile,” who reported that there was a highly statistically significant strong positive correlation between appreciative leadership and nurses’ work engagement. The study emphasized that leadership behaviors that reflect recognition, inspiration, and inclusion significantly increased nurses’ emotional and cognitive engagement at work.

This result was disagreed with (*Farid et al., 2021*) in the study titled, “Exploring the Influence of Leadership Style on Nurse Engagement in Understaffed Hospitals in Pakistan,” who reported that there was no statistically significant correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among nurses. The study indicated that due to overwhelming workload, lack of institutional support, and burnout, leadership style had minimal effect on engagement outcomes in their setting.

Conclusion

The current study concluded that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between appreciative leadership and work engagement among staff nurses.

Recommendations

In light of the study findings, the researcher recommended that hospitals should:

- Establish recognition systems that formally acknowledge nurses’ efforts and achievements to boost morale and engagement.
- Provide a supportive environment that fosters open communication between leaders and staff.
- Collaborate with colleagues and supervisors to create a positive and appreciative team culture.
- Regularly reflect on personal strengths and align them with work tasks to promote engagement.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the nursing staff and management of Andalusia Maadi Hospital for their cooperation and support in conducting this study. Special thanks are extended to Professor Dr. Lamia Ismail and Dr. Aliaa Ezz Eldin for their valuable guidance and continuous support throughout the research process.

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