



NURSING COURAGE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

İbrahim Sani MERT

Antalya Bilim University, Turkey

Ruslan HOLIEV

Antalya Bilim University, Turkey

Received: October 31, 2024

Accepted: November 28, 2024

Published: December 01, 2024

Abstract:

This systematic literature review investigates the concept of courage within nursing, analyzing 11 studies identified from Google Scholar and Web of Science. The review process followed a structured framework based on targeted research questions and analytical criteria. The study aims to expand scientific understanding of nursing courage and provide actionable guidance for empowering nurses in challenging conditions. Findings reveal that 10 of the studies were empirical, while 1 was a review article, with a primary focus on identifying individual and organizational factors linked to moral courage and on developing data collection instruments. Methodologically, the studies included 2 bibliometric analyses, 2 qualitative studies, and 7 quantitative studies, mostly involving nurses and nursing students. Across these studies, moral courage emerged as integral to ethical decision-making and professional integrity. Ethics-focused education and experiential learning were highlighted as key to bolstering moral courage in nursing. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration and ethical discourse within nursing practice were identified as vital components. In-service training, institutional support, and reward systems are recommended as means to enhance nurses' autonomy, bolster their professional standing, and foster courageous decision-making in clinical settings.

Keywords:

Courage, Workplace Courage, Nursing courage, Systematic Literature Review

JEL Classification:

I10, M12

1. Introduction

Courage is a quality that can be cultivated, appreciated, and rewarded. Unlike the battlefield heroism typically admired and idealized, courage in this context is the quiet yet profound bravery needed in everyday life and work. This type of courage acts as a foundation for other values such as honesty, ethical integrity, and moral strength, empowering individuals to trust themselves and act decisively (Gökgöz, 2023). Without courage, individuals may hesitate to make the right choices, restrained by fear or self-doubt. Thus, courage is seen as a key factor in effective decision-making in professional settings (Detert and Bruno, 2017). However, the elusive nature of courage has led to challenges in fully understanding its role and cultivating it, especially within organizational environments (Mert, 2022).

In the workplace, courage is essential for meaningful participation and action. Although sometimes understated, values and beliefs shape behavior in business life. A person's courage to address issues with superiors or subordinates reflects these deeply held convictions. Courage in the workplace can be seen as multi-dimensional, encompassing the courage to uphold personal and organizational values, to speak up, and to advance in one's career (Tkachenko et al., 2020). Workplace courage includes voicing concerns, expressing opinions, disagreeing when needed, reporting issues, and facing challenging or potentially reputation-impacting situations (Ulukapı Yılmaz and Yılmaz, 2024).

In nursing, workplace courage is a vital attribute that directly impacts patient care quality and the broader success of healthcare organizations. Nurses that show courage in their daily jobs make difficult decisions, advocate for their

patients, and confront obstacles head on. According to research, a workplace culture that encourages courage results in better patient outcomes, more employee satisfaction, and stronger organizational performance (Ebrahimi Ghassemi et al., 2019). Organizations that encourage and support nursing boldness are more likely to provide high levels of patient satisfaction and quality treatment.

Despite these good effects, workplace courage in nursing presents hurdles and potential drawbacks. Nurses who demonstrate courage in tough situations may face opposition from colleagues or superiors who are unwilling to accept change. Additionally, the emotional burden of consistently advocating for patients can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. It is therefore essential for healthcare organizations to provide robust support systems and resources to sustain nurses who courageously serve their patients. Given the critical and immediate implications in healthcare, courage in nursing may hold even greater significance than in other professions (Numminen et al., 2017).

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive review and synthesis of research on courage in the nursing profession, providing insights into its definitions, determinants, and implications in healthcare settings. Guided by specific research questions— What are the goals, methodologies, and examples of these studies? What data gathering technologies are utilized, and what findings have been observed?— this review aims to identify major authors and trends, demonstrating how our understanding of the field has grown over time. It also explores the extent of previous research to better understand the focus and applications of courage in nursing. The study investigates data gathering methods ranging from surveys to interviews and observational methodologies, revealing how researchers capture the complex dynamics of nursing courage. Finally, this study synthesizes the findings to evaluate how courage among nurses affects patient outcomes, nurse well-being, and organizational effectiveness, as well as the challenges and hazards that nurses confront when demonstrating courage. The study's questions aim to give a complete assessment of existing knowledge while also highlighting opportunities for future research and practice improvements.

In sum, this study aims to examine the concept of workplace courage specifically within nursing. Using a systematic review approach, it provides an in-depth analysis of the literature on nursing courage to offer a comprehensive understanding of its role and implications in healthcare.

2. Literature

2.1. The Concept of Courage

Courage has been a topic of profound discussion since the earliest philosophers, with extensive writings and debates dedicated to its nature. This historical interest has led to a renewed focus on courage in recent research, as if rediscovering an age-old ideal. Contemporary studies on courage span across disciplines, each exploring this concept uniquely and with varying objectives. Understanding how courage is studied within these fields offers valuable insights into managing it and guiding hypothetical studies (Chapa & Stringer, 2013).

At its core, courage involves overcoming fear, taking risks, and taking action despite potential negative consequences. It demands determination, honesty, and moral strength in facing difficult or dangerous situations. As Kantén and colleagues (2022) state, courage means standing behind the truth, even if it is uncomfortable. Acting courageously requires a blend of strength, endurance, and moral character that can inspire others to do the same. It is a fundamental human quality enabling people to confront challenges, pursue goals, and contribute to societal healing. Thus, courage is a multifaceted concept under continuous investigation across various disciplines (Mert, 2023).

Historically, courage has been considered a great virtue because it empowers individuals to confront both personal and social challenges. Early philosophical reflections on courage can be traced to Plato, who classified it as a virtue closely linked to wisdom. Plato viewed courage as a divine gift, second only to virtues like wisdom, humility, and justice, and argued that it is not a mere reflex but an intentional, thoughtful stance. Courage, he asserted, requires resilience in the face of adversity and a commitment to care for others, even during anxiety and uncertainty (Numminen et al., 2017; Sadooghiasl et al., 2018).

Modern perspectives align with these early insights but add psychological depth. Rate et al. (2007) identify courage within positive psychology as encompassing subjective experiences and individual traits. Hannah et al. (2007) describe it as a positive internal attitude that cultivates a courageous mindset, which bolsters personal resources, helps mitigate fear, and encourages courageous action. This mindset, though theoretically supported, is cultivated through experience and learning, effectively becoming “meta-knowledge” for future situations.

According to Rijamampianina (2018), courage is a critical resource that enables effective action in dangerous situations. Building on Aristotle and Maslow's work, courage is often defined by three main dimensions; fear (or danger), appropriate action, and purpose or goal. These three dimensions provide a framework for developing courage. First, individuals must build confidence to face fear and risk. Second, they should commit to taking appropriate action. Finally, there must be a higher purpose—something that transcends personal gain—to truly motivate courageous acts. Thus, courage, anchored in personal values, is intrinsically ethical, giving it profound significance in human behavior and morality (Köksal et al., 2022).

2.2. Types of Courage

As mentioned in the previous section that the concept of courage has a wide variety of types and definitions, there is an equal degree of variety and complexity in the identification and classification of types of courage. There are three main obstacles to studying and deepening general courage. The first obstacle arises from differences in the definition of courage (Osswald et al., 2010). There are a number of theories of courage that leave us in confusion and disagreement about the conceptual field of creating courage. Many definitions of the types of action have been proposed. Second barrier in the literature is a discussion of the many types of courage. The similarities and differences between these different species, these species relative to each other, which leads to confusion about (Nuyen et al., 2007). For example, moral courage, physical courage, and courage all of life is regarded as the courage, but it is not known exactly how this species are similar or different. It is not clear whether this is different. The difficulty of measuring courage constitutes the third research obstacle. All these differences in definition and classification, as well as the difficulty of measuring courage, also pose obstacles for researchers. In general, it can be argued that define and conceptualize the dimensions or types of courage studies are carried out on the contextual limitation of courage. For example, if a "type" of danger is perceived as physical or moral, courage is defined by the corresponding label, that is, physical or moral courage (Lomonaco et al., 2022). Boldly parsing into labels in this way prevents a common consensus and a common definition for all species. Although the dimensions and nature of courage differ in the literature, it is seen that it is studied in three dimensions, physical courage, moral courage and social courage. Although these dimensions are closely related to each other and are often used interchangeably, it is useful to separate them according to their critical characteristics (Gülbahar, 2023). From a philosophical point of view, courage is shaped by a person's will to act in the face of fear and anxiety, but this will manifests itself in different situations and forms. Physical courage is exhibited in the situation of facing bodily dangers; situations such as a soldier moving between bullets on the battlefield or a nurse working under the risk of an infectious disease are examples of such courage. This kind of courage means that a person overcomes existential fears and faces physical risks in order to survive or protect the life of others (Gülbahar and Özkan, 2023).

2.2.1. Moral courage

Moral courage, a current focus in courage study due to increased interest in ethical dilemmas and societal challenges, refers to individuals' ability to face tough activities such as confronting anxieties or trying again after failure (Pajakoski et al., 2021). It requires making the correct decision despite the possibility of social or economic consequences. Moral courage frequently arises in response to ethical transgressions or threats, necessitating a fundamental foundation that extends beyond simple adherence to laws. To accomplish ethical goals, organizational members require moral strength, also known as ethical resilience, to demonstrate consistent ethical behavior (Mohammadi et al., 2014).

Moreover, when motivations are grounded solely in material rewards, it is challenging to inspire virtuous action beyond self-interest. Moral courage, therefore, is not simply a reflex; it is cultivated through habit and the practice of doing what is known to be right. A good will or moral intention does not automatically lead to ethical actions; courage is required to bridge this gap. This courage provides the willpower needed to face ethical challenges and overcome obstacles that may prevent the right action. Employees who take personal risks to uphold their values and principles demonstrate a unique strength among their peers (May et al., 2014). Expressing moral or ethical views despite potential sanctions from organizational leaders exemplifies this courage. Organizations that value moral decision-making as a guiding principle can develop policies that support ethical responses to workplace challenges. However, moral decision-making is often influenced by conflicting values, social norms, emotions, and complex decision-making processes, which may disrupt the intent to act ethically (Yilmaz, 2022).

Moral courage is essential for individuals to uphold ethical behavior not only in their professional duties but also in human interactions across all areas of life, shaping the quality of relationships and cooperation (Way et al., 2024). Escolar-Chua (2018) emphasized that courage encompasses all virtues and values, guiding individuals to act ethically even if these actions face societal rejection or disapproval. Moral courage is the resilience to stay authentic amidst discomfort, disagreement, or rejection, with morality serving as its foundation. This courage, rooted in personal principles, functions as a catalyst for ethical actions (Mert & Aydemir, 2019).

Moral courage is, therefore, a causal mechanism behind virtuous actions. These behaviors are stable over time and across contexts, acting as character qualities that drive ethical consistency. By cultivating this form of courage, individuals can reinforce moral actions before challenges arise, which, in turn, promotes sustained ethical behavior (Gökgöz, 2023). However, demonstrating moral courage is challenging. Social rejection, which has similar neurobiological effects as physical pain, can deter individuals from acting courageously, especially when interacting with those who do not share their values. Despite its extensive exploration, the definition of moral courage remains contested, as some definitions overlap with general courage or other individual differences (Bickhoff et al., 2017).

Moral courage involves following inner principles to act for the benefit of others, even under personal threat. Ethically aligned individuals have a deep commitment to moral values, distinguish between right and wrong instinctively, and are equipped to make ethical decisions confidently (LaSala, 2010). Philosophically, Pianalto (2012) defines moral courage as acting in alignment with one's beliefs despite potential risks or punishment, emphasizing honesty and self-respect as essential components. This quality in leaders fosters a commitment to ethical action based on professional duty, empowering them to set and achieve ethical goals, even if it requires challenging norms or ending unethical practices (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007).

Moral courage as a skill enables individuals to preemptively address ethical issues, averting potential conflicts. Defined as a developed personal trait, moral courage requires a willingness to act ethically, face risks, and remain steadfast in moral conviction. Consistent alignment between values and actions characterizes morally courageous individuals (Comer & Sekerka, 2018). For managers, it is crucial to model leadership that upholds values, aligns words with actions, and fosters transparency, creating a culture that encourages ethical behavior (Chapa & Stringer, 2013).

For nurses, moral courage is the determination to do what is right and the strength to adhere to ethical principles, grounded in both individual conscience and professional responsibilities. They often face complex ethical dilemmas in their daily practice, where moral courage is essential, especially in situations that conflict with the medical team's decisions or when the ethicality of treatment choices is questioned (Edmonson, 2015).

Moral courage empowers nurses to advocate for their patients, particularly when patients' decisions are influenced by economic, political, or institutional pressures. In such cases, nurses actively work to ensure that patients' voices are heard and their rights are protected. They must defend patients' dignity and privacy, respecting individual preferences without hesitation (Black et al., 2014). For example, during end-of-life care, it takes moral courage to uphold a patient's wishes regarding medical treatment, especially in the face of conflicting opinions.

Furthermore, moral courage extends beyond individual patients; it also plays a crucial role in relationships with colleagues and superiors. When nurses observe unethical behavior or mistakes made by a colleague, it takes courage to address the issue and seek a resolution. This willingness to defend the truth, even at the risk of exclusion or retaliation, is a hallmark of moral courage.

Additionally, moral courage enables nurses to engage effectively in broader domains such as education, policy, and management, allowing them to combat systemic issues in the healthcare system to promote justice and equality (Berdida, 2023).

2.2.2. Physical courage

In ancient times, navigating the challenging path between cowardice and foolishness defined a soldier's courage, making them more valuable on the battlefield. The willingness to act appropriately in situations involving fear and faith has been universally valued throughout history. The military courage referenced here is a subtype of physical courage (Howard and Reiley, 2020).

However, it is important to recognize that this type of courage is neither universal nor absolute. Physical courage refers to the willingness to risk one's life or well-being for a worthy cause, with the emphasis primarily on physical risks. Both classical literature and scientific studies significantly contribute to the nuanced understanding of courage,

maintaining its relevance. In the 20th century, American writers particularly highlighted risk and perseverance, placing a strong emphasis on physical courage (Ulukapı Yılmaz and Yılmaz, 2024).

Often, labeling a specific action or individual as courageous serves not only to explain behavior but also to seek approval and encouragement from either individuals or the broader social context. In this sense, courage becomes a form of tribute to the act of execution. However, this perspective on courage rarely provides clear definitions that effectively differentiate courageous individuals from those who are not (O'Connell et al., 2024).

For nurses, physical courage embodies the determination to serve patients using both physical and emotional strength while navigating the demanding conditions of their profession. Hospitals and healthcare settings are often bustling environments where nurses routinely encounter tasks that demand significant physical endurance. Activities such as standing for long hours, carrying heavy equipment, or physically assisting patients push the limits of their physical capabilities. Yet, physical courage extends beyond merely enduring these challenges; it also encompasses confronting infectious diseases, handling hazardous materials, and managing high-stress emergency situations (Brooks, 2018).

In the face of an epidemic or infection, nurses work on the front lines, often risking their lives. This courage not only endangers their own health but also poses risks to their families. Nevertheless, their commitment to their profession drives them to accept these risks in the name of helping others. Particularly during pandemic periods, nurses have exemplified physical courage by their unwavering dedication to providing the best possible care to patients, even in environments fraught with fear and uncertainty (LaSala, 2010).

Physical courage also comes to the forefront during emergency medical interventions. In critical situations such as sudden cardiac arrest, respiratory failure, or trauma, nurses must act swiftly and implement life-saving measures. Exhibiting physical courage in these instances requires not only prompt and accurate actions but also the ability to push their own limits to sustain the patient's life. In chaotic and high-pressure environments like emergency departments or intensive care units, nurses frequently draw upon their physical endurance for the benefit of their patients, even amid fatigue, stress, and pressure (Ciesielski, 2022).

2.2.3. Social Courage

Having a voice in the workplace significantly enhances the management activities of an organization. Those who perform the job best understand its nuances. Consequently, employees' observations, experiences, and insights guide a company's operations. With the evolving business landscape, organizations now seek employees who actively engage in company activities rather than those who simply complete their tasks quietly (Edmonson, 2015). Companies desire enthusiastic individuals who show initiative and possess strong social and communication skills. This shift stems from the intensifying competition between companies, driven by rapid technological advancements, and highlights the importance of employee contributions to organizational success.

While social courage, which extends beyond effective communication in the workplace, is extensively discussed in management literature, less is known about the conditions that lead individuals to exhibit varying levels of courageous behavior (Kanten et al., 2022). Courageous actions typically involve doing the right thing; however, being truthful and taking ethical stands can sometimes lead to negative repercussions. Although this is not always the case, doing the right thing may inadvertently harm others and often necessitates taking risks. Individuals can express themselves more effectively when they feel comfortable, allowing them to speak and act correctly without hesitation. In this sense, individuals within organizations should be empowered to voice their opinions and act accordingly (Ucok Işlay, 2019). Therefore, individual risk-taking and bold initiatives are crucial for fostering effective corporate communication and promoting a culture of peace and justice within the workplace.

It's equally important for organizations to recognize the detrimental effects of employees choosing silence over courage. Failing to adapt to change can stifle employees who are developing their skills, proposing innovative ideas, and envisioning projects for the future. Encouraging social courage can lead to positive organizational behavior within the working environment. In this context, refusing to remain silent in the face of unethical behavior, proposing new ideas despite the risk of ridicule, and presenting in public despite anxiety exemplify social courage in the workplace (Medland et al., 2004). While organizational structure and climate influence the emergence of such behaviors, much of it is rooted in individual courage. Although many believe that demonstrating courage at work will primarily yield positive outcomes and foster happiness, it can sometimes lead to disappointment and sadness. This

complexity is acknowledged by theorists, with the significance of courage dating back to the works of Plato and Aristotle (Connor, 2017).

In light of current changes, the importance of courage in daily interactions has become increasingly apparent. According to Miller (2005), courage involves overcoming risk and adversity, and it is a quality that society should value. Courage, risk-taking, and fearlessness can manifest as attitudes and behaviors, ideally imbued with positive intentions. In this way, the risks undertaken become worthwhile. Positive outcomes resulting from courageous actions are essential for individuals to exhibit and sustain courageous behavior.

Courageous mindsets can be examined through four key elements: positive personality traits, social strength, values, and beliefs, as illustrated in Figure 1. Personal courage can be observed in both business and social contexts, particularly moral courage, which is the most desirable form of courage as it aligns with ethical behavior and positive goals. Numerous ethical practices in business embody moral courage. Given its close relationship with moral sensitivity, moral courage is instrumental in identifying and addressing ethical dilemmas in the workplace. It arises when an individual's moral and ethical values are challenged (Jablin, 2006).

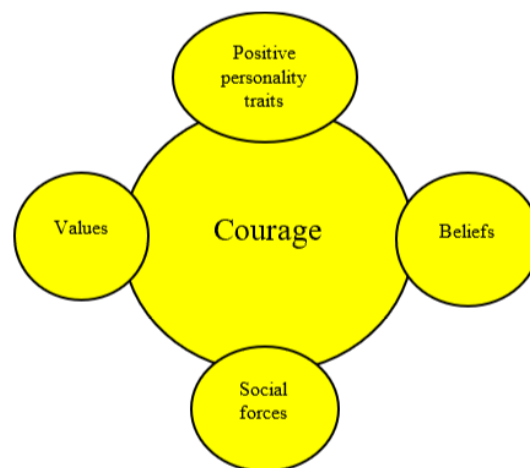


Figure 1. Dimensions of Courage (Arslan and Gül, 2023)

Moral courage enhances the meaning of work and improves the lives of employees. Moreover, the emergence of positive moral courage is closely linked to social innovation and the generation of new ideas, making it crucial for individuals and companies that foster courageous behavior. Courageous social service professionals and business leaders are often better equipped to face potential risks and challenge the status quo. However, exhibiting social courage in the workplace can also impact an employee's social relations and image, leading to potential material and emotional losses. In this regard, employees with social courage may demonstrate bolder behavior than their peers when confronting negativity in the workplace (Olsthoorn, 2007).

Social courage behaviors in professional life facilitate organizational transformation. Research indicates that social courage exhibited in the workplace is negatively associated with emotions such as stress, depression, and anxiety. It requires individuals to take risks in their social interactions. For instance, an employee may need the courage to report a supervisor's abusive behavior, or a supervisor might have to honestly evaluate a subordinate's performance (Rather et al., 2016). However, social courage can sometimes damage social relationships and harm an individual's reputation. For example, when an employee who displays social courage openly addresses a colleague's problematic behavior, the colleague may respond with anger or hostility. Similarly, if an employee demonstrates social courage by seeking help with a work-related issue, they risk being perceived as incompetent by other employees, potentially harming their reputation (Kaan Namal et al., 2024).

It is believed that individuals who are generally happier in the workplace tend to exhibit greater courage. Such individuals are often more resilient and motivated to meet challenges head-on. The positive consequences of social behavior linked to personal courage can further enhance overall happiness. For example, an employee who delivers

group presentations and briefs colleagues may be viewed as a high performer, increasing their likelihood of receiving promotions or praise for their contributions. However, despite the importance of social courage, very few empirical studies have investigated this concept to date (Hutchinson et al., 2015).

2.3. Courage at workplace

Courage in the workplace is a vital virtue that encompasses taking risks, facing uncertainty, and demonstrating resilience amid challenges. It is not confined to physical threats; it also manifests in moral and emotional dimensions. When an employee or leader exhibits courage, they do not hesitate to raise their voice against unfair practices or injustices, prioritizing the long-term well-being of the workplace over short-term personal risks (Yücel, 2020).

However, social behaviors that challenge the norm can lead to a risk of damaging social image or relationships. For instance, employees are often expected to engage in activities that may provoke friction, such as performance reviews and teamwork. Therefore, social courage becomes essential in daily interactions (Comer and Sekerka, 2018). This type of courage involves the willingness to risk one's reputation and social standing. In a rapidly changing business environment, individuals who embrace change and innovation rather than resist it are often defined as courageous. Such individuals actively seek to overcome the fear of failure, adopt new strategies, and learn from mistakes. In workplaces marked by fear or pressure, courage can be manifested through justice, honesty, and resilience (Koerner, 2014).

Workplace courage can be categorized into two main behaviors. The first involves actions that may damage interpersonal relationships, such as confronting a colleague about their problematic behavior, which may provoke hostility. The second involves the risk of losing social reputation. For example, when an employee asks for assistance, their colleagues might perceive them as incompetent or disruptive (Detert and Bruno, 2017). Despite these risks, employees often take social risks to contribute positively to their organizations. A manager, for instance, may need to assess a subordinate's performance, even if it risks damaging their friendship. The connection between social courage and organizational citizenship behaviors highlights the significance of courageous actions in enhancing workplace dynamics (Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Research indicates that, in individual contexts, social courage situations are often associated with less expected positive social outcomes and more anticipated negative outcomes. Thus, when confronted with negative repercussions, exercising social courage might not lead to an improvement in mood but could, in fact, worsen it. While helping behavior aims to serve others, social courage involves expressing dissatisfaction with authority figures without considering the potential downsides. In situations where abuses are prevalent, many individuals choose silence rather than report them (Magnano et al., 2022). Significant and unexpected events within organizations can motivate courageous individuals to step forward and address challenges. In essence, courage requires individuals to show their authentic selves, even when it risks social disapproval or punishment. It allows for the expression of ideas that may diverge from the majority's opinions (Yaşar, 2023).

Recognizing courageous behavior in the workplace can be challenging. People are more likely to assist those they empathize with, while empathy towards a victim does not necessarily drive the decision to act with civil courage. Social courage involves the willingness to jeopardize one's career, reputation, and relationships for the sake of standing up for what is right. Unlike physical courage, social courage often allows for cognitive evaluation before action and is influenced by different antecedents (Mkheimer et al., 2023). Social expectations can heavily influence individuals' behavioral choices, leading them to act against their core values and beliefs due to psychological pressure. In unfamiliar situations, individuals might rely on social comparisons to determine appropriate responses. For instance, followers of courageous leaders may draw strength from the belief that they can confront threats, thereby fostering a sense of collective courage. Conversely, when individuals speak out without facing pressure or threats, it is a genuine act of courage that benefits the organizational culture (Holmes et al., 2024).

Individuals often conform to social expectations to be liked (normative influence) or to appear correct (informational influence). They need to integrate their internal beliefs with social expectations to determine their responses. When their beliefs align with expected outcomes, individuals are more likely to act courageously; if not, they may choose the option that maximizes perceived benefits. Situations that test conformity can reveal a person's character, as they navigate the choice between honesty with themselves and yielding to others' beliefs (Dong et al., 2024).

Courage in the workplace, particularly when combined with empathy and understanding, enhances leadership quality. A courageous manager encourages employees to express their ideas freely, even when those ideas may disrupt established processes. Such leaders foster a culture of trust and open communication. Ultimately, courage signifies a commitment to challenging the status quo and upholding ethics and professionalism in fulfilling responsibilities (Yaşar, 2023).

In recent years, research on workplace courage has highlighted its multifaceted relationship with various dimensions of organizational life. This concept has progressed from a basic individual quality to a significant factor impacting total organizational success. According to studies, courage has a substantial impact on employee happiness, ethical behavior, leadership effectiveness, and performance.

For example, Santilli et al. (2024), Mohsin (2024), and Deeg and May (2022) have all emphasized the importance of bravery, which is strongly linked to grit, in individual experiences such as life happiness, career adaptability, and overall employee well-being. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) found that courage is associated with ethical behaviors such as corporate social responsibility, internal whistleblowing, and company loyalty, stressing its importance in preserving organizational integrity.

Furthermore, research in leadership contexts emphasizes the importance of courage. Studies by Fernando et al. (2022), Srivastava and Gupta (2022), and Cheng et al. (2019) show that bravery is inextricably linked to notions like employee-organization commitment, workplace spirituality, and ethical leadership. Alshehri and Elsaied (2022) also point out that courage is linked to virtuous leadership and the expression of a moral voice, demonstrating how it promotes a constructive leadership environment.

Courage has a tremendous impact on organizational success, going beyond the individual and social levels. Howard and Holmes (2020) and Howard and Cogswell (2019) found that courage correlates positively with key performance measures such as motivation, organizational citizenship behavior, and team performance. Tkachenko et al. (2020) further emphasized the robust connection between workplace courage and job performance, suggesting that courageous employees contribute more effectively to their organizations.

2.4. Courage in the Nursing Profession

Nursing is defined as a health discipline focused on protecting, developing, and improving the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities in the face of illness. Throughout history, nursing has been shaped by various religious beliefs and social changes. The industrial revolution in Europe marked the beginning of modernization in health services, with Florence Nightingale emerging as a pivotal figure known for her early scientific contributions to the field. While nursing addresses the health care needs of society, it also grapples with challenges such as insufficient education, role confusion, bureaucratic obstacles, and conflicts in physician-nurse relationships (Gallagher, 2011). These issues often hinder nurses from demonstrating ethical and moral behavior, underscoring the need for further research in this area.

Courage in nursing is intricately linked to the ethical responsibilities inherent in the profession, the desire to help others, and the determination to confront challenges. Nurses engage directly with human life daily, which encompasses not only physical care but also emotional and spiritual support. Courage is reflected in a nurse's ability to make sound decisions during complex situations, act calmly in emergencies, take risks to save patients' lives, and advocate for patient welfare, even when it means disagreeing with doctors or other health professionals (Taraz et al., 2019).

The ability of nurses to achieve their objectives and their moral development are crucial for providing appropriate and sustainable responses to both individual and societal needs. This ensures that nursing care practices are carried out with minimal errors. Given that health care involves human beings, moral development becomes increasingly urgent and significant (Numminen et al., 2017).

Before delving into studies related to moral courage in nursing, it is essential to address the related yet more extensively studied concept of moral anxiety. Moral anxiety has been explored across many healthcare settings and disciplines, leading to a wealth of research, commentary, and critique. Although the definition of moral anxiety can sometimes be misunderstood, it has evolved over time (Escolar-Chua, 2018). In its original form, moral distress occurs when an individual recognizes the correct course of action but finds it nearly impossible to follow due to institutional constraints. Jameton developed this theory, highlighting two stages of moral anxiety: initial and reactive, an approach that has been further utilized by other researchers. Jameton's important distinction is between moral distress (knowing the right action but being unable to take it) and moral dilemmas (uncertainty about the right choice

when faced with various options and values) (Walston, 2003). Hannah defines moral distress as an internal response to a perceived threat to an "objective good," reinforcing our perception of reality.

Courage is a fundamental value of the nursing profession, combined with two other values by Sigma Theta Tau International in 1992. Since then, nursing care has retained its significance as a center of professional ethics and quality care; however, the concept of courage has not been sufficiently emphasized (Mohammadi et al., 2022).

From a humanistic perspective, nurses need not only the courage to embody admirable human qualities but also the resolve to provide acceptable levels of care to patients, their families, and society. The literature identifies various types of courage, including psychological courage, which involves confronting irrational fears and anxieties (Thorup et al., 2012). Moral courage specifically enables nurses to continue performing humanitarian care actions while resisting morally questionable actions. Given their multifaceted roles, nurses are required to pay particular attention to moral courage, which empowers them to navigate obstacles like fear, thereby safeguarding patients' best interests. Despite its significance in nursing practice, moral courage receives insufficient attention, and research in this area remains limited, resulting in a lack of clear and precise definitions of the concept. Various studies exist in the theoretical nursing literature (Mollaei et al., 2018).

Moral courage has been discussed in multiple contexts, with most articles emphasizing the needs and strategies for nurses to cultivate virtuous and courageous actions to ensure quality care. As previously mentioned, moral courage is often indirectly addressed alongside moral distress, serving as a means to support nurses against the adverse effects of moral distress. A study conducted in Finland examined moral courage from the perspective of nursing, suggesting that the characteristics of a courageous nurse should include honesty, moral integrity, responsibility, advocacy, dedication, perseverance, and personal sacrifice. This study also indicated that the antecedents of moral courage are linked to ethical sensitivity, awareness, overcoming fear, and experience (Pen et al., 2023).

Courage is defined as the capacity to confront one's thoughts and actions honestly; for example, acknowledging and correcting mistakes, engaging in discussion, and learning from experiences. It also entails acting with honesty, confidence, open-mindedness, and integrity. Courage involves recognizing the differences in others, allowing one to compare their care situations with those of others. It means taking responsibility for another's vulnerability and protecting human dignity in genuine relationships (Pakizekho & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2022).

Courage is essential for advocating for patients' needs and treatment rights, and for intervening in their best interests. It is the determination to provide excellent care, endure challenges, and seek optimal solutions. Courage is an intrinsic virtue, an attitude of commitment, loyalty, and encouragement born from passion and love. In this light, being a courageous nurse involves a readiness for honesty in the healthcare environment (Gibson, 2018). It means being open, honest, and sensitive to patients' needs, in contrast to being manipulative, indifferent, or superficial. Through courageous actions, nurses instill hope, optimism, and healing within the human spirit.

Being a courageous nurse is a professional commitment driven by moral integrity, signifying responsibility and accountability. In the professional realm, courage is recognized as a hallmark of a good, responsible, and dedicated nurse striving for excellence. A courageous nurse should remain close to the patient and advocate for them, even amid risks. Acting with courage entails taking the necessary risks to ensure safe patient care (Naeini et al., 2020).

Courage in nursing is also the power to face human suffering and to maintain compassion in the midst of these sufferings. At the point when the patient's hopes are exhausted, it takes great courage for the nurse to continue to support him and keep hope alive during the treatment process. Those who work in this profession face death, illness and trauma every day and continue to serve people in the face of all these difficulties. A courageous nurse, takes care not only of physical needs, but also touches the emotional wounds of patients and families. Courage also requires nurses to be a strong voice. Sometimes they have to defend the rights of patients, object to practices that have gone wrong within medical teams, or take the initiative on patient safety. This is a responsibility based not only on knowledge, but also on professional courage. Not ignoring incorrect practices, maintaining ethical boundaries and respecting human dignity are part of nurses' professional courage (Khatiban et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

This section of the study provides information regarding the systematic review approach. Systematic reviews are a way of synthesizing scientific evidence to answer a specific research question in a clear and reproducible manner, while also seeking to incorporate all published information on the subject and assessing the quality of this evidence

(Lame 2019). Systematic reviews use particular, reproducible methods to identify, critically evaluate, and aggregate the findings of primary research papers (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014).

3.1. Research Documents

In this study, twelve research publications published between 2010 and 2024 on the topic of courage in the nursing profession were chosen using deliberate sampling. These research were based on both national and international literature. The Google Scholar and Web of Science databases were searched for the keywords "courage in nursing," "nursing," "courage," and "courage nurse," yielding eleven open-access studies. The titles and contents of these research are mentioned in the results section.

3.2. Collection and Analysis of Data

During data gathering for this study, eleven open-access papers published between 2010 and 2024 were found using the keywords "courage in nursing," "nursing," "courage," and "courage nurse" in the Google Scholar and Web of Science databases. The obtained data was rigorously reviewed, and the characteristics of each study were collated and analyzed. The analysis took place within the framework of the following research questions:

- Who are the authors, and what are the publication years of research on courage in the nursing profession?
- What are the objectives of the research on courage in the nursing profession?
- What methods were employed in the research on courage in the nursing profession?
- What examples of research on courage in the nursing profession are available?
- What data collection tools were used in the research on courage in the nursing profession?
- What are the results of research on courage in the nursing profession?

3.3. Research Design

The research framework created for the systematic examination of national and international research on courage in the nursing profession conducted between 2010 and 2024 presented in Figure 1.

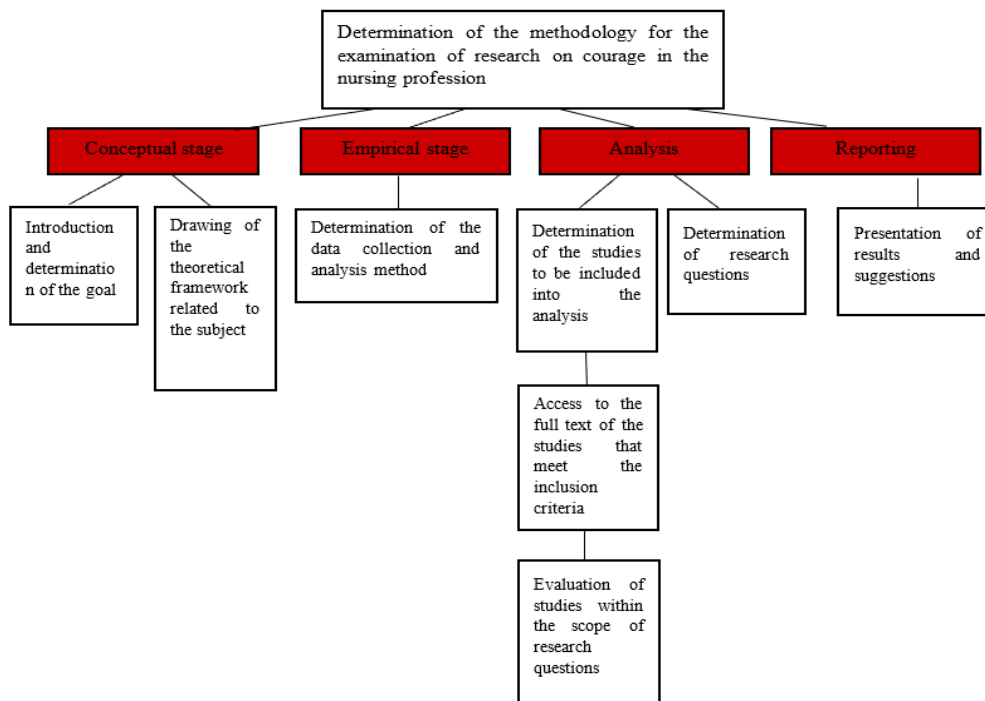


Figure 2. Flow Diagram of the Research Methodology

4. Results

In this study, the contents of the research on “Courage in the Nursing Profession,” sampled as part of the systematic review, were analyzed in terms of imprint, purpose, method, sample, and contributions. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Purpose, Method, Sample and Contributions of the Examined Researches

Author and Year	Type of Study	Goal	Methodology	Sampling	Data Collection Tools	Results
Lindh et al. (2010)	Research article	It is aimed to deepen the understanding of courage in nursing practice by using philosophical theories and experimental research on courage.	Bibliometric analysis	11 articles published between 1999 and 2009	-	It has been determined that encouraging courage among nurses and nursing students is imperative to prepare them for ethical, creative action and to advance the development of professional nursing practice.
Koskinen et al. (2020)	Research article	It was aimed to analyze the moral courage of nurses working in six European countries and the factors related to it.	Descriptive cross-sectional research	533 nurses and 1327 patients	Demographic Information Form, Nurse Qualification Scale	In all countries, the moral courage of nursing students has been rated decently high, and there are differences between countries and

						populations. These differences and relationships between moral courage and ethical education require further research.
Kleemola et al. (2020)	Research article	The aim of the study is to determine the experiences of nurses in care situations that require moral courage and their actions in these situations.	Descriptive analysis	611 Nurses working in Finland	Demographic Information Form, Nurses' Moral Courage Scale	Care situations that require moral courage focus on good and safe patient care, and the patient's well-being is at the center of attention. The cases are mostly related to the activities of other health workers. It has been determined that there is a need for research on the moral courage of physicians and managers and

						the experiences of patients and their relatives in care situations that require moral courage.
Hauhio et al. (2021)	Research article	It is aimed to define the self-assessed moral courage level of nurses and its relationship with socio-demographic factors.	Quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research	482 Nurses working in southern Finland	Demographic Information Form, Nurses' Moral Courage Scale	Nurses with higher level of moral courage has been observed in this context that a ternary relationship between formal and informal education ethics moral courage can be taught, learned and is a virtue that can be applied because the education of nurses has been seen as an appropriate way to strengthen the moral courage to defend. It is aimed that although nurses

						are morally courageous, moral courage should be part of their basic and continuous training in nurse education, thus ensuring the scope of theoretical and practical learning.
Konings et al. (2021)	Research article	It is the Dutch adaptation of the Nurses' Moral Courage Scale to identify the self-assessed moral courage levels of nurses in the Flemish region of Belgium and related socio-demographic factors.	Descriptive cross-sectional exploratory research	10 nurses under the age of 30	Demographic Information Form, Nurses' Moral Courage Scale	It has been determined that Flemish nurses perceive themselves as morally courageous, especially in a direct interpersonal relationship with their patients, and it has been found that it is more challenging to act boldly in ethical dilemmas involving other

						actors or organizations. The results have also shown that educational and ethical leadership are important in developing and supporting this basic virtue in nursing practice.
Pajakoski et al. (2021)	Research article	It is aimed to investigate moral courage and possible related individual and organizational factors in nursing.	Bibliometric analysis	25 research articles made in 2020	-	It shows that there is a need to promote multi-professional cooperation and discussion of ethical dilemmas in nursing practice in order to provide opportunities to increase moral courage. It seems justified to develop care environments where hierarchy does not inhibit

						the moral courage of nurses. It has also been reported that there is a need for more research on moral courage with different methodologies, interdisciplinary and international approaches.
Jena et al. (2021)	Research article	One game with moral courage through the mechanism of emotional art work-life integration and to determine the relationship between nurses ' work-life integration is intended to provide coping strategies to develop better.	Descriptive cross-sectional research	249 nurses	Emotional Reflexivity, Work-Life Integration and Courage, Demographic Information Questionnaire, Life Project Reflexivity Scale, Nurse's Moral Courage Scale, Work-Life Boundary Application Scale	In the study, it was determined that there is a positive correlation between reflexivity and work-life integration, therefore, nurses become better by strengthening their work-life integration, emotional reflexivity and moral courage.

Elmaoğlu and Eriş (2022)	Research article	The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of moral courage on autonomy in nurses.	Descriptive cross-sectional research method	226 nurses	Demographic Information Form, Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale, The Moral Courage Scale of Nurses	As a result of the study, it was determined that moral courage in nurses positively affects their autonomy, and it was revealed that in-service training and training on ethical and moral courage should be done at certain intervals.
Mert (2022)	Research article	The focus has been on the state of courage in business life and at work, it has been aimed to conduct a bibliometric analysis of articles related to topics such as courage in nursing discipline, work / workplace/ work life.	Bibliometric analysis	A total of 67 articles published in the last 30-year period between 1992-2022	-	With this study, it has been revealed how the increasing importance and influence of courage in business life is reflected in academic studies and how fast it has been studied by scientists in the last 30 years.

Kılıkçier et al. (2023)	Research article	It was aimed to investigate the effects of the ethical climate on the vocal behavior of oncology nurses by considering courage as a tool.	Predictive cross-sectional research method	71 Nurses employed as nurses in inpatient clinics of Hacettepe University Oncology Hospital	Trait Questionnaire, Courage Scale, Hospital Ethical Climate Questionnaire, Employee Voice Scale	Since the relationship between the ethical climate of a hospital and the vocal behavior of nurses includes many different variables, it has been revealed that courage can be considered as an intermediary in this relationship, but it will not be directly effective on its own.
Tanrıkulu et al. (2024)	Compilation	The concept of moral courage has been examined from an analytical and holistic point of view, and in addition to its importance in the nursing profession, it is aimed to discuss	Traditional compilation	-	-	It has been revealed that nurses need this courage in order to make the right decisions taking into account the benefit of the patient, this increases professional

		the strategies necessary for moral courage in nurses.				reputation, and in-service training, institutional support and reward systems should be effective for its development.
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5. Discussion and Conclusion

Systematic review studies is a research method that comprehensively and rigorously reviews the current scientific literature on a specific research question or topic. Such studies are carried out in order to collect, evaluate and synthesize the knowledge in a particular field. During the systematic review process, researchers carefully decipher all available studies that meet certain criteria, evaluate the quality of these studies and combine the obtained data with a methodological approach. The aim is to consider the findings in the literature as a whole, to understand contradictory results or to guide future research by detecting gaps. Systematic reviews, unlike traditional literature reviews, aim to be more objective and transparent in research processes. Studies are selected and analyzed with predetermined criteria, so that the possibility of any bias or bias in the research process is minimized. They are mostly supported by quantitative methods such as meta-analysis; this allows the results of similar studies to be statistically combined and stronger generalizations to be made. However, not every systematic review includes a meta-analysis, because sometimes there may be methodological differences between the studies under review, and in this case only a qualitative synthesis is performed.

Systematic review studies on the courage of nurses offer a critical perspective both in professional practice and in coping with ethical and emotional difficulties. Such reviews comprehensively analyze the available literature, scanning a wide range of situations that require physical, moral and emotional courage faced by nurses. Thus, it allows to understand the different dimensions of courage within the profession and how this courage plays a role both in patient care and in the development of health services. Systematic reviews can provide scientific evidence that courageous nurses achieve better outcomes, advocate effectively for patients, and are more successful in managing difficult situations. By examining the importance of courage in nursing practice in depth, these reviews reveal the positive impacts of courage on professional satisfaction and patient care, while also addressing the challenges nurses face and the coping strategies they employ. In addition, such a review can also contribute to the development of educational programs and support mechanisms for nurses. It is a guide for determining how courage can be encouraged and maintained, especially in situations such as ethical dilemmas, moments of crisis and stressful working conditions. However, systematic reviews reveal that courage is not only an individual virtue, but also how it interacts with organizational and social dynamics. Issues such as systemic obstacles encountered by nurses in the workplace, the effects of hierarchical structures on courage and occupational risks are also examined in depth. This can help to take concrete steps to improve health policies and workplace practices. A systematic review of nurses' courage also provides a strong basis for better understanding the effects of courage on professional success, job satisfaction, and patient satisfaction. The results obtained in all 11 studies examined in this study can be listed as follows:

- 10 of the studies are research articles, 1 is a review article,
- The objectives of the studies are to determine the individual or organizational factors related to moral courage in general and to provide the development of a data collection tool,
- 2 of the studies were carried out bibliometrically, 2 of them were carried out qualitatively and 7 of them were carried out quantitatively,
- The sample types of the studies are generally composed of nurses and nursing students,

Depending on the 11 reviewed articles, this study constantly show that moral courage is inextricably linked to ethical education and leadership. Formal and informal teaching opportunities that focus on ethical decision-making are critical in developing nurses' moral bravery (Lindh et al., 2010; Hauhio et al., 2021). Specifically, ethics-focused education is viewed as foundational, emphasizing the importance of incorporating these competences into basic and ongoing nursing training. Also, research by Konings et al. (2021) and Kılıkçer et al. (2023) suggests that courage is more likely to be demonstrated in interpersonal nurse-patient relationships than in broader organizational conflicts. This emphasizes the importance of ethical climates on moral bravery, implying that nurses feel more empowered when they perceive a supportive ethical environment, which can increase their assertiveness in decision-making. In terms of the impact of cultural and organizational context, research by Koskinen et al. (2020) and Pajakoski et al. (2021) reveals differences in moral courage across cultural and organizational settings. Differences in moral bravery among nurses from various European nations indicate that cultural influences and workplace contexts have a substantial impact on nurses' readiness to behave bravely, particularly in morally demanding situations. It emphasizes the importance of organizational cultures that promote multi-professional collaboration while reducing hierarchical barriers that may impede brave actions. On the other hand, several research show that moral courage and professional autonomy are positively related. Elmaoğlu and Eriş (2022) discovered that moral bravery empowers nurses by increasing autonomy and allowing them to make ethical decisions. This finding is consistent with suggestions for in-service training and ethical education as key supports for developing autonomy and bravery in nursing practice.

Additionally, Jena et al. (2021) found a link between emotional reflexivity, work-life integration, and moral courage in nurses. Nurses' resilience and moral bravery can be strengthened by skillfully addressing personal and professional problems. This emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive techniques that promote personal and professional development. Also, Mert's (2022) bibliometric research demonstrates an increasing awareness of courage in nursing literature. This increase is consistent with the increasing importance of moral courage in healthcare settings. To enhance professional identity and foster trust, nurses must consistently develop courage-focused competences in their work.

According to the research results, supporting courage in nurses and nursing students is important for the development of ethical actions and professional practices. Research shows that nursing students have a high level of moral courage, but more work is needed on this issue. It is emphasized that ethical education and experiences should be supported in order to increase the moral courage of nurses. Education is seen as an effective way to strengthen the moral courage of nurses. Moral courage is an important virtue in nursing practice, multi-disciplinary cooperation and discussion of ethical problems are necessary. In addition, it is stated that there is a positive relationship between work-life integration and emotional reflexivity, and it is recommended to organize in-service trainings to increase the autonomy of nurses. It has been shown that nurses make bold decisions taking into account the benefit of patients, increases their professional reputation, and institutional support and reward systems should be effective in this process.

According to these results, institutional support mechanisms that encourage the courage of nurses should also be developed. Especially rewarding the courage shown in making ethical decisions can motivate such behavior. In line with this, work-life integration that will allow applications that support flexible work schedules can increase professional satisfaction of nurses reflexivite and emotional. In addition, nurses to increase their autonomy, giving them more responsibility, it is important to support the expansion of institutional roles and leadership skills. This will allow nurses to take an active role in decision-making processes, not just limited to daily patient care. Interactive meetings and workshops where ethical issues are frequently discussed should be organized and nurses should be encouraged to express their opinions on these issues. Such activities will contribute to the fact that courage does not remain an individual virtue, but is a value shared and developed within the professional group. In addition, opportunities for gaining professional experience should be increased, taking into account that not only education plays an important role for the development of moral courage, but also experiences. To meet ethical challenges, it will support nurses to gain more experience, make bold decisions and improve their professional practice in the process.

In summary, the findings of this study can be encapsulated in the model presented in Figure 2. According to this model, nursing courage is classified into four categories, displayed as quadrants in Figure 2. These four categories are briefly explained below.



Figure 2. Nursing Courage Model

Educational underpinnings for nursing bravery highlight the value of ethics-centered education, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary teamwork. These factors enable nurses to tackle ethical challenges with confidence by incorporating moral ideas into their training, giving hands-on learning experiences, and encouraging them to examine diverse professional views. This foundation enhances their willingness to act boldly in difficult circumstances.

The organizational environment is critical in building moral courage because a supportive ethical atmosphere promotes open conversation and eliminates hierarchical constraints, making it simpler for nurses to make courageous, ethical decisions. Institutional support structures, like as ethics committees and peer networks, give critical direction, while reward systems celebrate brave acts, promoting a culture of ethical behavior and integrity in clinical practice.

Personal characteristics such as moral reflexivity and work-life integration help nurses maintain resilience and ethical alignment, allowing them to act courageously even while under stress. Reflexivity enables nurses to analyze their values and integrate them into their professional responsibilities, whereas work-life balance promotes emotional stability, reduces burnout, and increases moral bravery.

Professional development and recognition are essential for promoting nursing bravery, as autonomy and empowerment provide nurses the confidence to make independent ethical decisions. The constant practice of moral bravery strengthens their professional identity and integrity, gaining trust and respect in the healthcare community. The growing role of moral bravery in nursing strengthens the profession's commitment to high ethical standards and excellent patient care.

Conclusion

This systematic investigation sheds light on the multifaceted nature of courage in nursing practice, emphasizing its significance in ethical decision-making, patient advocacy, and overall professional pleasure. According to the existing

literature, courage is more than just an inherent personal trait; it is also highly influenced by organizational dynamics and the broader healthcare environment.

The findings emphasize the necessity of developing an institutional culture that fosters and rewards nurses' courageous actions. Healthcare organizations can increase their staff' moral courage by implementing effective educational programs and support mechanisms that enable them to navigate complex ethical quandaries and make bold decisions in the best interests of their patients. Furthermore, encouraging work-life integration and providing opportunities for professional development might help nurses feel more autonomous, fulfilled, and resilient.

This review also emphasizes the necessity for future research to fill gaps in the literature, particularly in terms of identifying the institutional barriers that impede nurses from showing courage. Investigating the relationship between hierarchical structures, organizational support, and moral courage development can help change health policy and practice, resulting in better patient outcomes and a more empowered nursing workforce.

Courage in nursing is a shared value that can be promoted by supportive organizational policies and comprehensive education. Recognizing and enhancing this crucial virtue enables nurses to better meet the ethical and emotional demands of healthcare, resulting in higher job satisfaction, professional achievement, and better patient care.

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