

Challenges to the Adoption of Ethical Leadership among Nurses: A Qualitative Study in a Moroccan Public Hospital

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Abstract

Background: Ethical leadership is promoted as a lever for improving care quality and managing occupational stress, yet the obstacles to its adoption among nurses in resource-constrained public hospitals remain underexplored.

Purpose: To explore the challenges nurses associate with adopting ethical leadership; this paper reports one theme from a larger qualitative study in a Moroccan public hospital.

Methodology: Twenty-seven nurses, including 11 head nurses, took part in semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide. Verbatim transcripts underwent thematic content analysis using NVivo.

Key Findings: Five interrelated challenges emerged.

1. Structural-contextual constraints: lack of material resources and institutional support, generating moral distress, being expected to lead ethically while structurally prevented from doing so.
2. The perceived non-teachable nature of ethics, seen as innate or shaped by early family and social education.
3. Personal limits: emotional self-regulation and blurred personal-professional boundaries.
4. Team resistance to change: disengagement, cynicism and distrust.
5. Prejudice: ethical initiatives suspected of idealism or hidden self-interest.

Conclusion: In this public-hospital context, adopting ethical leadership is hindered mainly by structural, cultural and relational barriers. These findings are context-bound and not generalisable, but they suggest promotion strategies should target organisational conditions, not training alone.

Keywords

Barriers, ethical leadership, nurses, qualitative study.