**Spiritual Leadership Model as a Paradigm for Nursing Leadership: A Review Article**

Parivash Jahandar 1, Mansoureh Zagheri Tafreshi 2,*, Maryam Rassouli 3, Foroozan Atashzadeh-Shoorideh 4

1 PhD Student in Nursing, Department of Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery. Shiraz Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
2 Associate Professor Department of Nursing Management School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shiraz Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
3 Associate Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shiraz Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.
4 Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shiraz Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author: Mansoureh Zagheri Tafreshi, Department of Nursing Management School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shiraz Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Email: m.z.tafreshi@sbmu.ac.ir

### Abstract

**Introduction:** The aim of this study was to explain how the spiritual leadership model could be used as a paradigm for nursing leadership. Nursing leaders play a critical role in the management of the health care system. Spiritual leadership is a new area that has recently been considered in nursing management.

**Methods:** In this review article, electronic databases (PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar and Science Direct) were searched from September 2014 to July 2016 to find relevant articles using keywords, such as spirituality, leadership, management, nurses and motivation. In this regard, the articles that fulfilled the goals of the study that were written in English or Persian, had their full texts accessible, and were published in the intended time interval were entered in the study. The articles without authors’ names and dates and non-scientific papers were excluded from the study. On the whole, a total of 120 articles were obtained, of which 48 were selected and analyzed.

**Results:** A review of the literature focusing on spiritual leadership demonstrated that the spiritual leadership model has been examined in different countries, various fields of the industry, trade training, and the health system with positive individual and organizational consequences. It seems that the characteristics of this style of leadership fits the nursing profession as well. Of course, more large-scale future studies for testing this model of leadership in the field of nursing will bring about more promising results.

**Conclusions:** Spiritual leadership could improve the organizational productivity and employees’ satisfaction. Nursing leaders should have paid greater attention to this type of leadership to achieve positive organizational outcomes; therefore, they need more training in this issue.

---

**INTRODUCTION**

Nursing employees are essential members of the healthcare system [1] and nurse managers, who lead the largest group of the workforce, play an important role in defining the organization’s mission and values [2]. Today, the nursing system has encountered various challenges, such as workforce shortage, staff retention issues, and stressful environment, thus it seems necessary to examine new types of leadership to help leaders overcome these challenges [3]; leadership models that support ethical aspects, consider workforce well-being, and improve organizational performance [4]. In response to this need, Fairholm (1997, 1998, and 2003) was the first researcher, who proposed spiritual leadership as a holistic approach considering leaders, followers, and organization. However, this model was not developed because of the absence of a measurement tool to test the model in empirical studies [5]. In spite of many suggestions about different ways in which spirituality could affect leadership, the most comprehensive theory was developed by Fry (2003, 2005). The Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT) was a new look at leadership based on an intrinsic motivation framework, and proposed three dimensions of spiritual leadership, spiritual well-being, and organizational outcomes [6]; [7]; [8]. Fry...
Leadership has been a subject of interest for centuries; scientific studies on this topic was only initiated in the 20th century [7]. Different theories have been offered to provide descriptions of leadership and to help leaders influence their followers achieving organizational goals. There are numerous theories of leadership, which include the trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, path-goal theory, situational leadership theory, transactional, and transformational leadership theory [12]. Fry (2003) suggested that former leadership theories paid attention to one or more aspects of the physical, mental, or emotional elements of human interaction in organizations yet ignored the spiritual element [11]. Spiritual leadership is a developing paradigm designed to provide an intrinsic motivation to help organizational transformation [4]. This is a causal model [13] for motivating and inspiring employees through a superior vision and a corporate culture based on altruism. This theory provides the essential needs of leaders and followers for spiritual well-being through meaning and membership, and nurtures higher levels of worker life satisfaction, social responsibility, and performance excellence [8]; [9]; [14] (Fig 1).

**Dimensions of Fry’s Spiritual Leadership Theory**

**Spiritual Leadership**

In Fry’s model, the dimension of “spiritual leadership” consists of three components as below:

**Vision**

Fry states that the vision shows the purpose of an organization [7], and has an important role in developing leaders’ personality [15] with three important functions, including specification of the change direction, simplification of many precise decisions, and coordination of actions [7].

**Hope/Faith**

Fry noted that hope is a desire of fulfillment and faith, which improves confidence. Hope/faith will clarify where the people are going, how to get there, and face conflict and tolerate hardship for achieving their aims. It is believed to be the source that helps organizations achieve their vision, purpose, and mission [7]; [16].

**Spiritual Well-Being**

In Fry’s model, the dimension of “spiritual wellbeing” had a mediating role with two components: (1) a sense of transcendence, calling or being called (vocationally) and (2) a call for community, membership or belonging [9], [16].

**Meaning**

Calling as a characteristic of a professional, refers to how a person finds meaning and purpose in life by making a difference through his services to others [9]. Fry (2003) [7] suggested “meaning” to describe the meaningful work that had been described by Ashmos and Duchon in 2000 [5].

**Membership**

Membership defines a sense of belonging or connection in the organization that leads to a feeling of understanding, respect and appreciation in people [9]. For achieving higher purposes, they should be a member of a group and transcend their self-interests [15]. In relations of “spiritual well-being”, Fry (2003, 2005) stated that applying spiritual leadership at the individual level will lead to higher life satisfaction [11]. Calling and membership make people more attached, loyal, and committed to their organization, therefore, a positive increase in spiritual well-being leads to positive organizational consequences, such as commitment and productivity [9].
Chen and Yang (2012) [17], Chen and Li (2012) [18], and Torkamani et al. (2015) [10] also emphasized on the mediating role of spiritual well-being. Their findings showed that calling and membership positively predicted employees’ altruism towards colleagues and increased conscientiousness, productivity, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment.

Organizational Outcomes
To date, the results of many studies from various countries and cultures about spiritual leadership indicated that it predicts important outcomes [8], such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, altruism, self-career management, self-growth, job involvement, organizational citizenship behavior, community, loyalty, productivity, life satisfaction, and negatively related to inter role conflict, frustration, earning manipulation, and instrumental commitment [11]; [16]; [9].

Attribution of Spiritual Leadership
In the past two decades, researchers have attempted to explain the conceptual and empirical construct of the spiritual leadership model [6]. The initial model of spiritual leadership (2003) was tested by Fry et al. (2005) and the findings showed that it was a causal model and its measures were reliable and valid. Fry (2008) tried to develop a methodology for future research on spiritual leadership and organizational development and included inner life and life satisfaction in his initial model [8]. The inner life has been proposed by Fry as the source of spiritual leadership or spiritual practice to help people grow beyond self and joining a group for promoting the common good [14]. Fry et al. (2016) [9] defined life satisfaction as a general appraisal of person’s life that inspires or motivates them to achieve goals, and play an important role in subjective well-being. According to Krishna-Kumar et al. (2015) [6], Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT) theoretically has some positive aspects: First, it has positive social emotions, such as forgiveness, gratitude, and hope to help people do things more productively. Second, both leaders and followers in this model experience some feelings and emotions as an interactional approach. Third, commitment and productivity are organizational outcomes that have been offered by SLT as a causal model. Fourth, a sense of assistance, self-regulation, self-motivation, and social awareness is inspired in SLT. Finally, leaders can use this model for the strategic management framework.

Application of Spiritual Leadership Theory in Nursing
Nurses, who work in critical situations and for long hours, need a new style of leadership to encourage them towards achieving mutual goals with a shared vision in health care organizations [3]. This leadership style should enable leaders to motivate and empower nurses and lead organizations to achieve improved working conditions and best patient outcomes [19]. Nursing needs an effective leadership style to improve standards of nursing practice, staff retention, and patient satisfaction [20]. To date, Fry’s spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2009) in the US has been tested in a variety of settings, such as schools, universities, military units, city governments, police, and Baldrige award recipient organizations. The study results supported the findings of a significant positive influence of spiritual leadership on employee life satisfaction, organizational commitment, and productivity [9]. In many countries outside the US, such as China, Taiwan, India, Malaysia, Turkish, and Korea, researchers also found the validity of the spiritual leadership model (such as in [17]; [18]; [21]; [22]; [11]. In Iran, several studies have examined this model in different contexts, such as the hotel industry [23], banks [24], [25], gas companies [10], and health care industries [26], yet there is still a need to validate this model in nursing settings in Iran. Recently, the concept of spirituality, especially in health care, has received more consideration [27], and with the findings of studies about SLT in health care, there has been an increase in the tendency of managers to test this model in the nursing field [3]. Reimer-Kirkham et al. (2012) [28] stated that although nurse leaders are aware of the effect of spirituality and leadership in nursing, yet they are still very careful in integrating spirituality into leadership practice in health care organizations and believed that it is influenced by a lot of contextual factors. Nelson (2008) [3] in a qualitative study emphasized that if the managers and nursing students are taught about spiritual leadership, their ability to solve problems and manage the workforce will be improved and they could provide a good working environment for their staff.

CONCLUSIONS
The health care system in the 21st century is continuously changing. Economic problems, staff retention, work environment, and increasing client expectations are the most challenging issues in nursing management. In this changing system, it is necessary for leaders to use an effective leadership
style for overcoming challenges. In the cultural and religious context of Iran, spiritual leadership as one of the most effective leadership styles, could find its true position in nursing management. The present article's authors tried to describe spiritual leadership theory and its use across the healthcare system, especially in nursing management as a new paradigm.

Limitations
This study also included documents published in the English language. Accordingly, documents in other languages, as well as unpublished data on spiritual leadership were not included in the analysis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
All professors, managers and nursing colleagues, who were directly involved in the study and writing of this article are honored. There was no conflict of interest among the authors.

REFERENCES
2. Aitamaa E, Leino-Kilpi H, Iltanen S, Suhonen R. Ethical problems directly involved in the study and writing of this article are unpublished data on spiritual leadership were not included as additional data on spiritual leadership. Int J Learning Organization, in Employees of Bidboland Gas Company. 2014;6(3):175-87. DOI: 10.1037/a0036597
20. Curtis E, O’Connell R. Essential leadership skills for motivating and developing staff: An empowered team is enthusiastic about its work and will deliver high quality care. The key, argue Elizabeth Curtis and Rhona O’Connell, is transformational leadership. Nurs Manage. 2011;18(5):32-5.