Exploring Moral Courage in Nursing

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ABSTRACT

Moral courage in nursing has many different meanings but most agree it is a necessary trait for a nurse to have in order to increase patient safety, satisfaction, and enhance patient outcomes (Kosmehl et al., 2020). It may refer to the ability of a nurse to take moral action that he believes to be right with the goal of safeguarding the patient’s best interest (Ko et al., 2020, p. 68). It may also involve the willingness of the nurse to take the right action in the face of forces that would lead the nurse to take a different action (Gibson et al., 2020). Within nursing, moral courage is often framed within the larger context of moral distress. It has been argued that “moral courage relieves moral distress” and thereby increases the overall well-being of the nurse as well as increasing the nurse’s satisfaction and commitment to work (Kleemola et al., 2020).

The nursing work environment is widely acknowledged as being dynamic, stressful, and complex. Moral distress has been widely discussed in the nursing literature since it was first defined by Andrew Jameton in 1984 and is recognized as the stress associated with the ethical elements of daily practice in the context of increasing demands (Deschenes et al., 2020). Moral distress takes on many forms with the most common reasons being, failure to advocate for one’s patient, failure to stop an undesirable behavior and failure to act in the best interest of one’s patient (Deschenes et al., 2020). Moral courage is the ability of the individual to restore integrity in response to moral adversity and is one potential strategy to ease moral distress (Holtz et al., 2018).

This meta-synthesis is designed to facilitate knowledge development on moral courage by examining the qualitative data available, reflecting on common themes, and considering the data in a new light.

METHODS

Noblit and Hare’s (1988) meta-ethnographic approach guides this meta-synthesis as it is a commonly used and accepted method to guide interpretive works by focusing on careful interpretation and translation of findings culminating in a synthesis (Polit & Beck, 2021). There were 5 criteria for inclusion and no research was excluded based on the quality of the study as the goal was to explore the concept of moral courage.

KEY search terms

“moral courage” OR “moral resilience” OR “moral certitude”

AND

“nursing” AND “qualitative”

REFERENCES


CONCLUSIONS

Steps need to be taken to enhance and cultivate moral courage and resilience in nurses to assist in dealing with the moral distress often encountered in clinical practice (Gibson et al., 2020). Nurses who possess moral courage are better able to act in an ethically congruent manner despite challenges, as it helps them to more effectively advocate for their patients (Kosmehl et al., 2020). After synthesizing the available qualitative data, the following strategies emerged on potential ways to inspire and sustain moral courage. This meta-synthesis highlights the need for more research into the concept of moral courage and how to further cultivate it.