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Exploratory Study of Strength in Service and Self-Efficacy among Nursing Officers

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Abstract

Nursing officers (Nurses) are literally the backbone of the healthcare system as they help the patient and the healthcare system as a whole run smooth. They will have character strength and self-efficacy (belief in their ability to succeed and achieve) and, most importantly, both of these psychological traits will strongly shape their work performance and adaptability. The following study analyses these characteristics in the health care environment between government and private sector nurses, and provides comparative insight into their symptoms and outcomes. There were 208 nurses who included equal number of nurses working in government and private hospitals. Results found clear differences in character strengths between both groups. Nurses in government sector exhibited weaker character strengths of perseverance, fairness, leadership, spirituality etc. These characteristics stem from the way they adapted to environments with competing resources in which community and adaptability are key to survival. On the contrary, private-sector nurses were more self-efficacious, social intelligent and brave possibly due to the target-setting organizational cultures that reward personal success and proactivity. These differences highlight the unique demands and pressures in different healthcare sectors. This finding signifies that self-efficacy in their professional abilities was distributed equally among the nurses working in government and private sectors. Government nurses must frequently respond to confronting systemic issues and resource limitations, demanding resilience and collective problem-solving.

Keywords: Resilience, Self-Efficacy, Public Sector Nursing Officers, Private Sector Nursing Officers

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Nursing is a complex career with both technical, psychological and emotional demands on its practitioners. Integral to these attributes are character strengths, or traits like integrity, compassion, and perseverance, that enable nurses to address ethical quandaries and provide quality care (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Not just elevating clinical performance but also promoting well-being. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) attributes self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to accomplish

goals, as a major factor in influencing decision-making and the way one copes with stress, which ultimately affects job performance. This is the story in which you find yourself engaged in implementing evidence of character strengths and self-efficacy. The government and private healthcare environments have different effects on these psychological characteristics. Frequently, nurses in government facilities work under resource constraints, requiring adaptability,

teamwork, and resilience to cope with high patient loads and systemic inefficiencies. A culture that encourages collective problem-solving and improvisation is often seen as necessary for providing high-quality care in adverse conditions (Aiken et al., 2001). In contrast, private healthcare settings offer organized and resource-abundant environments. The environments in those facilities are optimized for efficiency, definitions of procedures, advanced technologies (Laschinger et al., 2016) and issues related to search wittiness (Laschinger & Leiter, 2006); the difference in workplace setting has also affected the psychological characteristics nurses get within each role.

Self-efficacy in nursing has been significantly acknowledged; however, the relationship between character strengths and self-efficacy in diverse healthcare settings has not been entirely explored. As both attributes are vital in seeking solutions to 21st century global health challenges, it is important to appreciate the relationship between the two.” For example, the combination of high compassion and integrity, alongside high self-efficacy not only contributes to improve patient-centred care but enhances care in situations where emotions are high or ethical dilemmas arise (Schneider & Whitehead, 2013). Likewise, perseverance can strengthen resilience, enabling nurses to function under high-pressure scenarios (Heffernan et al., 2010).

Character strengths are positive traits that are deeply woven into the fabric of our being and give us our moral compass (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Personal strengths, including kindness, perseverance and gratitude are considered personal characteristics rather than just skills that can contribute to individual thriving and a

thriving society (Linley, 2008). These virtues are the cornerstones of a good life, after all: they allow people to deal with struggles, develop meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities in constructive ways (Niemiec, 2014). Character strengths have received considerable attention in positive psychology, a field that focuses on the understanding and enhancement of what it means to be human and live a good life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Building on this, researchers have developed a whole taxonomy of character strengths, typically divided into six core virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Strengths aren't mutually exclusive, and they interact in various ways to produce personality and behaviour (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). In addition to helping individuals flourish, character strengths contribute positively to social change. Working to cultivate and utilize strengths can help build more compassionate, just, and resilient communities (Niemiec, 2012). For example, promoting positive attributes like teamwork, leadership, and citizenship contributes to higher levels of civic engagement and united societies (Luthans & Avolio, 2002). Thus, character strengths are fundamental elements of both a good life and a meaningful life. Each of these strengths is critical to understanding ourselves, developing ourselves, and becoming our best selves. Continued research on character strengths will provide a deeper understanding of their importance to human flourishing and insights for individuals, educators, and policy-makers devoted to a more virtuous and flourishing society.

This study intends to fill this gap by comparing nurse character strengths and

self-efficacy across the healthcare stage and private sectors. Through differences and similarities, the study aims for targeted interventions to aid the professionals and psycho-social well-being those nurses (**Retired nurse RNT, 2022**). For instance, individualized training sessions focusing on improving self-efficacy and cultivating targeted character strengths may increase workforce happiness and improve attrition rates. Additionally, these efforts can significantly improve healthcare outcomes, making them advantageous for patients as well as providers. Ultimately, of the many professions that we encounter on a daily basis, nursing is one such profession that is both mentally and physically demanding yet very gratifying due to the synergistic effect of character strengths and self-efficacy. Although government and private healthcare settings further define and shape these attributes, a better understanding of their relationship can guide approaches to improve the nursing performance. Future research in this area will benefit not only the practitioners themselves but also their contribution to the healthcare system.

Objectives

- i) To compare character strengths between government and private sector nurses.
- ii) To assess differences in self-efficacy across these two groups.

Hypotheses

- i) Government nurses will exhibit stronger character strengths than private sector nurses.
- ii) Private nurses will demonstrate higher self-efficacy than government nurses.

Rationale of the Study

As key providers of patient care, nurses are central to healthcare delivery and the backbone of the system. But too often, their mental health and career development is neglected, representing a major shortcoming of health systems. This study is based on the premise that character strengths and self-efficacy of nurses are impacted by the unique environments provided by government and private healthcare sectors that offer their own types of challenges as well as other forms of opportunities. Nurses in the public health sector encounter inadequate resources, heavy patient loads, and institutional challenges. These conditions require high self-efficacy in order to provide quality care with scarce resources. Private sector nurses are typically working in more organized systems and have better resources. However, that private sector focus on efficiency and performance may do a disservice to the cultivation of the softer skills, such as empathy and teamwork, that undergird adequate care of patients. This study contributes to an understanding of such heterogeneity, because interventions should be designed according to the context of the problems faced by the nurses. This research addresses how the expression of character strengths differs, and how self-efficacy is experience-dependent; a check to assess this in government vs. private nursing setting was conducted to provide tangible results to reflect upon to ensure that we have a resilient, flexible and altruistic nursing workforce. The results of this study will help propose the necessary guidelines for targeted training programs and policies that could promote the psychological well-being of nurses and their professional skills. These programs will boost not just the levels of job satisfaction and performance; critical links

to improve patient outcomes and fortify health systems everywhere.

Sample

The sample consisted of 208 nurses, 104 (50%) from government and 104 (50%) from private health sector. A stratified random sampling technique was used, which ensured the participation of individuals from different age categories, level of experience, included specialties, etc.

Research Design

A cross-sectional comparative study using validated psychometric tools was conducted to compare the differences between the character strength and self-efficacy among the nurses working in the government and private sectors. The study focused on key psychological traits to identify potential variations across contexts of organization. The objective measures using psychometric assessments provide a reliable comparison to these attributes.

Tools used:

- i) **Values in Action Questionnaire (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)** The Values in Action (VIA) Questionnaire is a self-report measure of six universal virtues: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. As well as assessing 24-character strengths, such as Curiosity, Creativity, Love of Learning, Judgment, Perspective, Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty, Zest,

Capacity to Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence, Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership, Forgiveness, Humility, Self-control and Caution. The questionnaire includes consists of 240 items (10 items for each character strength), with responses being given on a 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency for the instrument overall was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Good ($r > 0.70$) four-month test-retest performance. The most prominent five-character strengths are identified (scored in descending order) as 'signature strengths.'

- ii) **General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)** The confidence in facing challenges is measured by this 10-item scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Responses are made using a 4-point Likert scale, higher scores indicating stronger self-efficacy. The General Self-Efficacy Scale is designed to measure an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish tasks and handle challenges. It contains ten items, and responses are rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 'not at all true' (1) to 'exactly true' (4). The total score is calculated by summing the responses, with higher scores indicating a greater level of self-efficacy. **Rimm and Jerusalem (1999)** reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.80 for this scale,

indicating its good reliability. **Procedure:** This study was carried out in three months trying to get nurses in urban and semi-urban hospitals. Ethics Committee approval by institutional review board (IRB) was obtained, and all data point were included only after informed consent was acquired from participants. Surveys were distributed at off-peak times to limit disruption to hospital functioning, with individual completion of a survey taking approximately 20 minutes per participant. Next, all respondents remained anonymous and were coded to protect the confidentiality and privacy of all participants before any analysis. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 27 with statistical tests to extract information. This systematic

method resulted in reliable and valid data whilst being respectful of participants’ rights and least disruptive to their regular duties. These health professionals provided detailed data that has the potential to inform further research and understanding of this phenomenon.

Results

Independent sample t test was performed to compare self-efficacy scores of nurses working in government and private sectors. The self-efficacy between the two groups was not statistically significant $t = 0.897, p > .05$. The mean (SD) self-efficacy score among government sector nurses was 29.91 (5.13) and among private sector nurses was 30.52 (4.74). These results indicate a similar level of self-efficacy among nurses working in government and private sectors (See Table 1).

Table1

Descriptive Statistics and Comparative Analysis of Self-Efficacy Scores Among Government and Private Nurses.

Variable	Nurses (Mean ± SD)		t-value
	Government Sector (N = 104)	Private Sector (N = 104)	
Self-Efficacy	29.91 ± 5.13	30.52 ± 4.74	.897

****Significant at 0.01 level; *Significant at 0.05 level**

This finding indicates that nurses working in both government and private sectors possess similar levels of confidence

in their professional abilities. The lack of a significant difference suggests that the work environment, whether public or private, does

not substantially impact nurses' perceived self-efficacy. This suggests that factors beyond the sector in which nurses work may play a larger role in determining nurses' sense of self-efficacy. Indeed, independent samples t-test revealed significant differences in character strengths between government and private sector nurses ($p < 0.01$). In fact, private sector nurses' scores were significantly higher on nearly all character strengths dimensions compared to their government sector counterparts. Nurses working in the private sector were significantly higher on 'curiosity' ($M = 30.26$, $SD = 4.01$) than those in the government sector ($M = 28.23$, $SD = 6.05$) ($t = 2.86$, $p < .01$). Once again, private sector nurses ($M = 37.30$, $SD = 4.52$) showed a

statistically significant higher 'love of learning' than their government sector counterparts ($M = 27.97$, $SD = 6.56$), ($t = 11.94$, $p < .01$), which showcases their eager to learn new information. In terms of 'judgment' private sector nurses scored significantly higher ($M = 35.93$, $SD = 4.56$) than their government counterparts ($M = 28.37$, $SD = 6.31$), ($t = 9.89$, $p < .01$), indicating superior critical thinking and decision-making abilities. While both groups showed comparable levels of 'creativity' the differences were not statistically significant, ($t = 1.17$, $p > .05$). However, private sector nurses excelled in 'wisdom' ($M = 33.33$, $SD = 4.55$) compared to government nurses ($M = 28.30$, $SD = 6.21$), ($t = 6.65$, $p < .01$).

Table 2

Mean Scores and Comparative Analysis of 24 Character Strengths Among Government and Private Nurses.

Character Strengths	Nurses (Mean \pm SD)		t-value
	Government Sector (N = 104)	Private Sector (N = 104)	
Curiosity	28.23 \pm 6.05	30.26 \pm 4.01	2.86**
Love of learning	27.97 \pm 6.56	37.30 \pm 4.52	11.94**
Judgement	28.37 \pm 6.31	35.93 \pm 4.56	9.89**
Creativity	28.17 \pm 6.32	29.32 \pm 7.73	1.17
Social intelligence	28.37 \pm 5.89	29.42 \pm 6.82	1.18**
Wisdom	28.30 \pm 6.21	33.33 \pm 4.55	6.65**
Bravery	28.83 \pm 6.15	35.19 \pm 4.47	8.51**
Perseverance	28.23 \pm 6.05	37.23 \pm 3.62	13.00**
Honesty	27.87 \pm 6.34	33.83 \pm 7.97	5.96**
Kindness	28.26 \pm 6.53	33.50 \pm 6.95	5.59
Capacity to love	27.37 \pm 6.04	25.03 \pm 5.16	2.99*
Citizenship	27.44 \pm 6.48	35.72 \pm 4.86	10.41**
Fairness	28.20 \pm 6.55	39.78 \pm 1.26	17.68**
Leadership	28.27 \pm 6.50	35.29 \pm 4.94	8.75**
Self-control	28.12 \pm 6.62	32.86 \pm 5.33	5.68*
Caution	28.08 \pm 6.47	39.44 \pm 3.60	15.63**

Appreciation of Beauty	28.14 ± 6.45	33.47 ± 5.55	6.37
Gratitude	27.75 ± 5.96	39.71 ± 1.45	19.86**
Hope	28.05 ± 6.45	35.07 ± 5.25	8.59
Spirituality	28.10 ± 6.28	39.51 ± 1.64	17.90**
Humanity	27.09 ± 6.18	35.59 ± 3.75	11.98**
Humor	27.56 ± 6.22	39.61 ± 2.49	18.32**
Forgiveness	27.43 ± 5.98	32.99 ± 6.64	6.33*
Zest	27.49 ± 5.85	39.80 ± 1.13	21.06**

****Significant at 0.01 level; *Significant at 0.05 level**

Scores in 'Bravery' (M = 35.19, SD = 4.47 vs. M = 28.83, SD = 6.15), (t = 8.51, p < .01), and 'perseverance' (M = 37.23, SD = 3.62 vs. M = 28.23, SD = 6.05), (t = 13.00, p < .01), which reflect, even more, the strengths of private nurses in dealing with challenges effectively. Similarly, they rated their 'honesty' much higher than public nurses (M = 33.83, SD = 7.97 vs. M = 27.87, SD = 6.34), (t = 5.96, p < .01). Notably, 'kindness' was the only dimension on which government sector nurses scored equivalent (M = 28.26, SD = 6.53) than private sector nurses (M = 33.50, SD = 6.95), (t = 5.59, non-sig.), suggesting an equivalent tendency toward altruism among government nurses. Nurses working in the private sector scored higher on 'leadership' (M = 35.29, SD = 4.94 vs. M = 28.27, SD = 6.50), (t = 8.75, p < .01), and 'self-control' for private and government sector nurses was (M = 32.86, SD = 5.33 vs. M = 28.12, SD = 6.62), (t = 5.68, p < .05).

There were no statistically significant differences between government and private sector nurses in creativity, kindness, appreciation of beauty, and hope based on analysis of character strengths. For creativity (t = 1.17) and kindness (t = 5.59), t-values were not significant on the 0.05: this means that there were no differences between groups in these character strengths and the t-values for 'appreciation of beauty' (t = 6.37) and 'hope' were also not

significant (t = 8.59). The findings showed that government and private sector nurses had significantly different scores in their 'capacity to love' (t = 2.99, p < .05) and 'forgiveness' (t = 6.33, p < .05). Nurses in private sector scored significantly higher than nurses in government sector in both character strengths. This makes governments want to keep control over some outsourced sectors (like nurses in this case) because this will further prove to the world that private sector nurses have more love to give, for example more forgiveness and compassion than government everyday nurses.

This study found substantial differences in 8 main personality traits between private and government sector nurses. Intellectual curiosity and love of learning were at higher levels among nurses working in the private sector when compared to their colleagues in the government sector. Their judgment was also rated at a higher level, demonstrating overall better critical thinking and decision-making skills. Although creativity levels were similar, private sector nurses outperformed public sector nurses in all six dimensions of social intelligence, and private sector nurses were wiser, more courageous, and more persistent when confronted with challenges. They showed more leadership qualities and more self-control as well. Nurses working in the government sector scored higher in kindness

which could be indicative of an orientation towards altruism. The findings indicate that private sector nurses excel in key signature strengths such as curiosity, love of learning, judgment, and social intelligence. These traits highlight their ability to explore, acquire knowledge, make sound decisions, and connect empathetically with others. However, creativity was an exception, suggesting that innovation or imaginative problem-solving might not be as pronounced in this group. This could reflect organizational priorities or workplace environments that emphasize structured approaches over creative expression. Overall, these strengths are crucial for effective nursing practice, contributing to their adaptability and patient care skills. Distinct personality characteristics observed in the two sectors suggest a stronger focus on intellectual expansion, self-growth and adept management among private sector professionals. Overall, across the domains, private sector nurses demonstrate significantly greater character strengths, with kindness as the exception. Some of these differences may be due to workplace environments, organizational cultures, and opportunities to develop professionally in both sectors.

Discussion

Such findings are consistent with the available literature on nursing psychology. Nursing is rooted in resilience (McAllister & McKinnon, 2009), which aligns with what we see from government nurses, whose ratios of respective strengths exhibited are at least three to one among remaining character strengths (Gill, Bliwise, & Bliwise, 2019). According to Bandura's (1997) framework of self-efficacy, supportive environments also play a role and, thus, private nurses may have better self-efficacy scores than public

nurses. Nurse employees of all specialties will benefit from interventions tailored to these findings. The government hospitals could help stimulate self-efficacy through workshops and mentorship sessions and the private sector hospitals could help build character strengths to enhance teamwork and empathy within the workforce. Longitudinal trends and intervention impacts could further substantiate these insights in future studies. Nurses find themselves in stressful, high-pressure environments, making the application of character strengths particularly crucial. Nursing resilience, a strength from the courage virtue, is the ability of nurses to bounce back after facing unfortunate cases like critical patients and heavy workloads (Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013). Likewise, the virtue of humanity encapsulates empathy and kindness, thus ensuring better relationships with patients resulting in compassionate care, an absolute requirement in the government and private hospitals alike. Evidence suggests that HRPs are positively related to job satisfaction and inversely related to burnout in healthcare workers (HCPs). Studies find that more optimistic nurses with higher levels of perseverance cope better with work-related stressors and experience less emotional exhaustion (McCarthy, 2017). In fact, strengthening character has a positive impact on the well-being of nurses, including their mental health and understanding of the need to work.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's specific competence to engage in the behaviours necessary to reach particular goals (Bandura, 1997). In nursing, self-efficacy affects the manner in which nurses deal with their work, their confidence in completing tasks, and their ability to balance the emotional toll of patient care. Bandura

(1997) postulated that self-efficacy comprises four principal sources: mastery experiences, social modelling, social persuasion, and physiological states. Individuals with high self-efficacy display better performance in clinical tasks, increased job satisfaction, and favourable patient outcomes (Brouwers, Tomic, & Thijs, 2011). Higher self-efficacy is associated with more autonomous decision-making and improved patient care, as well as a greater sense of accomplishment among nurses. Moreover, self-efficacy may serve as a buffer to protect from stress, as nurses with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to cope effectively in the face of hardship and navigate a demanding work environment (Benight & Bandura, 2004).

Self-efficacy in government and private nursing may vary based on resources and working conditions, and in terms of the context of government and private nursing care. One common aspect of working in government hospitals is that there are high patient loads and limited resource availability as compared to private hospitals. These factors contribute to self-efficacy as the feeling of inadequacy or helplessness over the matter (Vaughan & Waugh, 2018). In contrast, nurses in private hospitals may have a more supportive work environment with better resources leading to higher levels of self-efficacy. But those settings can also come with pressure about performance goals and patient satisfaction metrics, which can erode confidence at times. Nurses operating in a range of environments both under government and private auspices have challenges affecting the psychological resources of their strengths of character and self-efficacy. Government hospitals tend to serve lower-income, more diverse patients, which can mean more complex cases and higher caseloads. Limited resources can lead

to burnout for these nurses, which may lower their self-efficacy (Vaughan & Waugh, 2018). On the other hand, some character strengths that foster personal and professional development such as courage and perseverance can be nurtured through these challenges in life (Seligman, 2011; Begley, 2009).

In contrast, nurses working in private hospitals typically operate in more resource-rich settings with better opportunities for professional development and work-life balance (Johansen, 2017). In this context, we may see an increase in self-efficacy and character traits like gratitude and optimism because of increased job satisfaction and recognition of their efforts by the nurses (Harten, 2018). Yet the demands of patient expectations, the desire to achieve high standards of care, in the face of a free-market, consumerist approach to health-care provision have sometimes led to burnout and decreasing job satisfaction, which can test the sustainability of such character strengths as hope and kindness. The professional quality of nurses can be improved by strengthening their character strengths and self-efficacy. As an example, Brouwers et al. (2011) noted that nurses who scored high on self-efficacy reported more positive psychological outcomes (less anxiety, less depression) and a greater overall sense of satisfaction with their work process. While this is a world of positive outcomes, refereeing along with the development of mindfulness; the “I have always” attitude is not easy for nurses who work in the field of hospitals and are exposed to both the emotional and physical stress on a daily basis, especially being a doctor. Character strengths, like optimism and gratitude, assist nurses with keeping a positive mind-set even when situations are challenging, encouraging mental resilience. The

Affordances of Self-Efficacy through Character Strengths When a nurse has a well-developed self-efficacy, they're far more likely to ride out the tough times with persistence, bounce back from potential adversity and remain hopeful and optimistic (character strengths) which ultimately helps fortify their self-belief further ultimately translating to how well they perform at work and their psychological health (Schwabenbauer & Steger, 2018).

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