

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

Parivash Jahandar <sup>1</sup>, Mansoureh Zagheri Tafreshi <sup>2,\*</sup>, Maryam Rassouli <sup>3</sup>, Foroozan Atashzadeh-Shoorideh <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD Student in Nursing, Department of Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shahid Behshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor Department of Nursing Management School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shahid Behshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shahid Behshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Shahid Behshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran



CrossMark

DOI: 10.29252/ANM-027041

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

Submitted: 04/12/2016

Accepted: 26/12/2017

### Keywords:

Spirituality  
Leadership  
Management  
Nurses Motivation

### How to Cite this Article:

Jahandar P, Zagheri Tafreshi M, Rassouli M, Atashzadeh-Shoorideh F. Spiritual Leadership Model as a Paradigm for Nursing Leadership: A Review Article. *Adv Nurs Midwifery*. 2018;27(3):43-46. DOI: 10.21859/ANM-027031

© 2018. Advances in Nursing and Midwifery

### 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, staffs 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

(2003) [7] believed that SLT is a more holistic leadership style that considers spirituality as an important component along with physical, mental or emotional aspects of human interaction in the organizations. Today, integrating spirituality with leadership is necessary for the nursing discipline due to the holistic approach in healthcare leadership. Although there are other value-based theories, such as authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and ecological leadership [6], spiritual leadership as an effective way in different settings [9-11], seems more suitable for nursing. This model has the potential to transform the nursing environment, improve staff retention, promote productivity, provide meaningfulness, and reduce challenges in the nursing profession [3]. A review of studies indicated that there are a few studies in the area of spiritual leadership in the nursing profession, therefore, this study aimed at explaining this type of leadership and its application as a new paradigm in nursing to assist nursing leaders to fulfill their goals.

## METHODS

A review of the literature using advanced search with keywords "spirituality, leadership, management, nurses, and motivation" retrieved 128 full text articles and abstracts. Considering the inclusion criteria, i.e. focus of the article on spiritual leadership, being a scientific or review article, being within the publication time interval, and accessibility of full texts of the articles, and also the exclusion criteria, i.e. inaccessibility of the full texts of the articles, articles without authors' names and date, and non-scientific articles, the obtained papers were investigated at two stages. In the first stage, articles that had not used Fry's model of spiritual leadership or the articles that were based on spiritual care were omitted from the study so that a total of 94 articles remained. In the second stage, articles related to spiritual leadership were studied meticulously and only articles, which had investigated the test of spiritual leadership model, had analyzed this model, or pertained to nursing management were selected ending with 24 qualified articles that were finally entered in the study.

## Spiritual Leadership Theory

Leadership has been a subject of interest for centuries; scientific studies on this topic was only initiated in the 20<sup>th</sup> 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].

#### Altruistic Love

Perception of integrity and well-being created with care, concern, and gratitude for leaders and followers has been described as altruistic love in spiritual leadership. It is a part of an organizational culture, which defines ethical values, assumption, and thinking shared by group members [16].

#### 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].

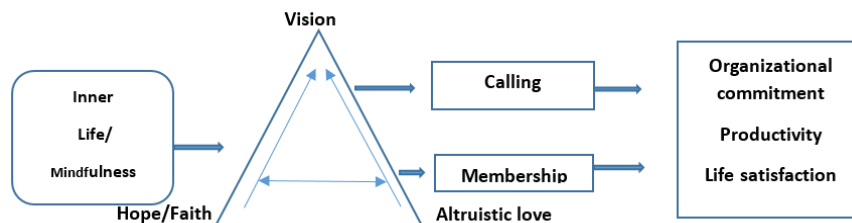


Figure 1: Model of Spiritual Leadership (Fry et al, 2016)

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 going 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 motives 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

- Buchan J, Twigg D, Dussault G, Duffield C, Stone PW. Policies to sustain the nursing workforce: an international perspective. *Int Nurs Rev*. 2015;62(2):162-70. DOI: [10.1111/inr.12169](https://doi.org/10.1111/inr.12169) PMID: [25639942](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25639942/)
- Aitamaa E, Leino-Kilpi H, Iltanen S, Suhonen R. Ethical problems in nursing management: The views of nurse managers. *Nurs Ethics*. 2016;23(6):646-58. DOI: [10.1177/0969733015579309](https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733015579309) PMID: [25899724](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25899724/)
- Nelson BA. *Spiritual leadership in healthcare: University of Northern Colorado*; 2008.
- Fry LW, Matherly LL, Ouimet JR. The spiritual leadership balanced scorecard business model: the case of the Cordon Bleu-Tomasso Corporation. *J Manage Spirit Religion*. 2010;7(4):283-314.
- Jeon KS. The relationship of perception of organization performance and spiritual leadership, workplace spirituality, and learning organization culture in the Korean context. Pennsylvania, USA The Pennsylvania State University; 2011.
- Krishnakumar S, Houghton JD, Neck CP, Ellison CN. The "good" and the "bad" of spiritual leadership. *J Manage Spirit Religion*. 2015;12(1):17-37. DOI: [10.1080/14766086.2014.886518](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2014.886518)
- Fry LW. Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *Leadersh Q*. 2003;14(6):693-727. DOI: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001)
- Benefiel M, Fry LW, Geigle D. Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace: History, Theory, and Research. *Psychol Religion Spirit*. 2014;6(3):175-87. DOI: [10.1037/a0036597](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036597)
- Fry LW, Latham JR, Clinebell SK, Krahnke K. Spiritual leadership as a model for performance excellence: a study of Baldrige award recipients. *J Manage Spirit Religion*. 2017;14(1):22-47. DOI: [10.1080/14766086.2016.1202130](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2016.1202130)
- Torkamani ZN, Naami AZ, Sheykhshabani SH. The Effect of Spiritual Leadership with Organizational Commitment, Productivity and Knowledge Performance with Mediating Spiritual Well-Being and Learning Organization, in Employees of Bidboland Gas Company International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Research. *Int J Psychol Behav Res*. 2015;4(1):133-43.
- Jeon KS, Passmore DL, Lee C, Hunsaker W. Spiritual leadership: A validation study in a Korean context. *J Manage Spirit Religion*. 2013;10(4):342-57.
- Sajjadi A. New emerging leadership theories and styles. *Techn J Eng Appl Sci*. 2014;4(3):180-8.
- Fry LW, Vitucci S, Cedillo M. Spiritual leadership and army transformation: Theory, measurement, and establishing a baseline. *Leadersh Q*. 2005;16(5):835-62. DOI: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.07.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.07.012)
- Egel E, Fry LW. Spiritual Leadership as a Model for Islamic Leadership. *Public Integr*. 2017;19(1):77-95. DOI: [10.1080/10999922.2016.1200411](https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2016.1200411)
- Sweeney PJ, Fry LW. Character development through spiritual leadership. *Consult Psychol J Pract Res*. 2012;64(2):89.
- Fry LW, Hannah ST, Noel M, Walumbwa FO. Impact of spiritual leadership on unit performance (Retracted article. See vol. 25, pg. 1073, 2014). *Leadersh Q*. 2011;22(2):259-70. DOI: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.02.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.02.002)
- Chen CY, Yang CY, Li CL. Spiritual Leadership, Follower Mediators, and Organizational Outcomes: Evidence From Three Industries Across Two Major Chinese Societies. *J Appl Soc Psychol*. 2012;42(4):890-938. DOI: [10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00834.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00834.x)
- Chen CY, Yang CF. The Impact of Spiritual Leadership on Organizational Citizenship Behavior: A Multi-Sample Analysis. *J Busin Ethics*. 2012;105(1):107-14. DOI: [10.1007/s10551-011-0953-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0953-3)
- Radovich P, Palaganas J, Kiemeney J, Strother B, Bruneau B, Hamilton L. Enhancing Leadership Orientation Through Simulation. *Crit Care Nurs*. 2011;31(5):58-63. DOI: [10.4037/ccn2011463](https://doi.org/10.4037/ccn2011463)
- 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.
- Ayranci E, Semercioz F. The relationship between spiritual leadership and issues of spirituality and religiosity: A study of top Turkish managers. *Int J Busin Manage*. 2011;6(4):136.
- Jamaludin Z, Rahman N, Makhbul ZKM, Idris F. Do transactional, transformational and spiritual leadership styles distinct? A conceptual insight. *J Glob Busin Econom*. 2011;2(1):73-85.
- Salehzadeh R, Pool JK, Lashaki JK, Dolati H, Jamkhaneh HB. Studying the effect of spiritual leadership on organizational performance: an empirical study in hotel industry. *Int J Cult Tourism Hosp Res*. 2015;9(3):346-59. DOI: [10.1108/ijcthr-03-2015-0012](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijcthr-03-2015-0012)
- Khoshpanjeh M, Rahnama A, SeyedKalan MM, Hoseinpour A. Evaluating the Role of Spiritual Leadership Dimensions in Employee Empowerment and their Effect on Workforce Productivity. *J Busin Appl Sci Res*. 2012;2(8):7681-9.
- Chegini MG, Nezhad ZF. The effect of spiritual leadership and other elements on employees' empowerment of Iran's bank: Case study of Guilan Province. *Afr J Busin Manage*. 2012;6(28):8420.
- Abdizadeh M, Khiabani MM. Implementing the spiritual leadership model in the healthcare industry in Iran. *Int J Busin Manage*. 2014;9(11):92.
- Memaryan N, Rassouli M, Mehrabi M. Spirituality Concept by Health Professionals in Iran: A Qualitative Study. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2016;2016:8913870. DOI: [10.1155/2016/8913870](https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/8913870) PMID: [27493675](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27493675/)
- Reimer-Kirkham S, Pesut B, Sawatzky R, Cochrane M, Redmond A. Discourses of spirituality and leadership in nursing: a mixed methods analysis. *J Nurs Manag*. 2012;20(8):1029-38. DOI: [10.1111/j.1365-2834.2012.01480.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2012.01480.x) PMID: [23151105](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23151105/)