JCRCN - Journal of Comprehensive Research in Cancer Nursing
Volume 1, Issue 2 | November-2025
e-ISSN: 3068-6245 ISSN Print: 3068-6237

Developing Compassionate Leadership and Resiliency in the face of Public Health Disasters: A Developing Theoretical Construct

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Received: 09-09-2025; Revised: 29-09-2025; Accepted: 15-10-2025; Published: 24-11-2025

Abstract

The article presents the analysis of the emergent theoretical framework development that can help improve compassionate leadership practices and resilience practices in the face of a public health emergency. During the time of crisis like a pandemic, the need to have a leader who is empathetic, flexible, and strong becomes eminent. This theory combines the elements of caring science, transformative leadership, and emotional intelligence all in a bid to help its leaders in the uncertain and stressful situations. It focuses on the interconnection between caring and resilient leadership practices that maintain morale, continuity and stimulate group well-being. Combining the learning evidence of crisis leadership with qualitative research findings, it can be viewed as a tool used by leaders in the field of health management and work in the context of government service organizations to both meaningfully and effectively work in a complex situation during an emergency in the health sector.

Keywords: ***Caring leadership, resilience, public health emergencies, emergent theory, emotional intelligence, crisis leadership, compassionate leadership, adaptive leadership, health crisis management, transformational leadership.***

1.Introduction

With the unprecedented global public health crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, health infrastructures in the world witnessed massive structural and emotional pressure. Nurse leaders were among the most adversely affected because they are charged with the responsibility of coordinating the clinical activities as well as being the ambassadors of compassionate care. These people were bound into uncontrollable and many times daunting conditions where the classic leadership models could no longer apply. The sudden change in clinical flow, the increased emotional workload, and the staffing emergency demanded another type of leader one tied to empathy, resourcefulness, and psychological fortitude.

The pandemic demonstrated a rather disquieting fact of many nurse leaders being ill-equipped to handle the bilateral problem of the operational management and spiritual caregiving in the extreme circumstances. Hospitals were epicenters of stress and not only did frontliners have to find a way to cope with medical crises, but they also had to strive to protect their psychological and emotional well-being. Nursing leaders were operating in positions that were outside of the clinical--comforting grieving families, counseling upset employees, and frequently directly treating patients because of employee resignations or infections. The situations highlighted the dire necessity of coming up with an emergent theoretical framework that would enable nurse leaders to uphold compassion and nurture resilience of themselves and their teams(1).

In the elaboration of a such framework, there is a meeting of two core concepts being caring and resilience in leadership. Caring, as a concept in the nursing profession, goes beyond the physical health treatment; to a nurse, he/she is connected to the patient on an emotional, moral, even a religious level. Leadership resilience on the contrary is the ability of those in charge to subject themselves to pressure, the ability to recover as well as the ability to provide clarity and empathy in leadership even in hardship. In times of a public health emergency, these factors cannot be separated and must be jointly conducted in order to ensure that the healthcare is efficiently distributed and that the workforce can also be maintained.

With the COVID-19 outbreak, the weakness of the system in terms of nurse leaders becameconclusive. All of these people were exposed to a variety of hardships: increasing infection rates, declining workforce, the shortage of resources, and the lack of logic behind the policies. However, notwithstanding these challenges, most responded quite charmingly- deftness in the face of ambiguity, rapid decision making and overall team spirit in descend order turn upside down environments. The experiences also provide insight into what adaptive leadership entails

together with an emerging theory that has placed caring as a strategic leadership tool other than an ethos of nursing only.

The novel direction promotes the idea that caring and leadership resilience are not inherent qualities, rather, they are a dynamic process of co- construction in the existence of interpersonal relationships, cultural organizational and policy contexts. Caring as explicated in the theory under consideration is redefined as not an emotional labor but a deliberate, tactical act that helps increase the reputation of a working team, decreasing burnout and increasing the outcomes of patients. Besides, it makes a critical emphasis on the role of emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and strengths-based leadership in building spaces where not only patients but also caregivers can prosper.

The realization of its psychological implications on the minds of leaders also in the case of pandemics was another eye-opener. Fear, sadness, ethical wounding, and empathetic stress became familiar emotional situations to many nurse leaders. To many, the impulse to defend others and work through their own weakness called not only on inner reserves of strength but of moral clarity as well. Self-care, peer support, and mindfulness have been found at the center of resilience in leadership in this emergent theory. Instead of thinking of resilience as a part of personality, it promotes a developmental perspective of resilience(2)- one that considers resilience as a quality that may be taught and learned through reflection, mentoring, and organizational scaffolding.

Moreover, nurturing culture of psychological safety became one of the major leadership requirements. When nurse leaders created the atmosphere in which people could speak freely, express their vulnerabilities and become respectful to each other, the morale was improved, and the turnover decreased. Individuals in the team became more empowered when voicing their concerns, seeking help, and assisting one another. This is explained by the fact that in such regard the role of the leader was transformed into the one of emotional grounding, ethical role modeling and motivational support. Such changes show that there has been a development of a leadership model with emphasis on relational caring where emotional presence of the leader is as important as technical competence.

With more of a macro perspective in mind, the pandemic served as a so-called crucible of leadership change. It also compelled nursing leadership to be more dynamic in every aspect including cultural awareness and interprofessional collaboration. There was the need to engage governmental agencies, health policy, and cross-disciplinary teams as nurse leaders championed the welfare of their staffs. All these experiences made it clear that there are a demand of leadership development programs that include interventions on crisis preparedness, emotional resilience, and compassionate communication(3).

It is against these challenges that theoretical elaborations on caring and leadership resilience are able to respond not only to the situation at hand, but can also act as resourceful frameworks of guidance in addressing emerging crises. It is an expression of a change of reactive leadership to purposeful, values-directed governance in healthcare. This theory holds that employing the notions of compassion, facilitating reflective practice, and fostering strengths-based engagement, the nurse leaders may create teams, not only efficacious, but also sustainable in emotional terms.

This study highlights the importance of the fact that compassion and resilience are n Travel no longer; it is a must-have qualification to be a leader during the time of crisis. With the healthcare industry planning to deal with future pandemics and global healthcare crises, the need to provide nurse leaders with strong theoretical basis of caring and resiliency is critical. This theoretical progress is not only beneficial to the people who are already in leadership but acts as a developmental model to future leaders, policymakers, and nursing educators in the field.

2.Methodology

This research study used a structured methodology to develop theory such that caring and leadership resiliency in times of public health emergencies could be incorporated in a theoretically organized way and mainly contains the classic approach to theory development proposed by Walker and Avant (2005). Their model has been the most influential strategy in building a nursing theory, especially according to its clarity in describing the synthesis, derivation and analysis of theoretical concepts. These pillars of methodology were used as the base to establish a framework of consistent and context-specific theory to deal with the distinct issues that nurse leaders were presented with during the global health threats like the COVID-19 pandemic(4).

Synthesis Theory Based

The first step in the research was theory synthesis which is the process by which a set of interconnected yet hitherto unrelated concepts are located, analyzed and converted into a single framework. Such a method helped to identify core concepts on which the study majors, i.e. caring leadership, resilience, and nursing response in the case of

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public health emergencies. On the one hand, the literature was thoroughly considered in terms of collection of empirical and conceptual information related with the themes. The review included not only classic nursing theories (e.g., caring theory proposed by Boykin and Schoenhofer, the theory of human caring by Watson, etc.), but also modern leadership frameworks like emotional intelligence, strengths-based leadership, and trauma-informed leadership approaches during a crisis.

After drawing main ideas, their connections were plotted to draw patterns, connections, and interaction between two or more key concepts. The process made it possible to build a theoretical architecture where caring practices and resilience strategies would be integrated as the interdependent parts of successful nursing leadership in the circumstances of crisis.

TABLE 1 Summary of Theoretical Development Methodology

Phase	Method Used	Purpose	Key Activities
1. Theory Synthesis	Walker & Avant (2005)	Identify and integrate key concepts from literature	Defined focal concepts (e.g., caring, resilience, leadership); mapped relationships
2. Theory Derivation	Adaptation from Parent Theories	Translate relevant constructs from external domains into nursing context	Adapted Watson's Caring Theory; integrated resilience from leadership literature
3. Theory Analysis	Concept and Theory Evaluation	Assess internal coherence, relevance, and clarity	Validated through real-world nursing experiences; clarified operational definitions
4. Framework Integration	Model Structuring & Validation	Combine all concepts into a practical framework for nurse leaders	Developed holistic pathways for fostering caring and resilience

Theory derivation process

The second methodological step entailed derivation of theory. This was especially required because there was no cohesive and pre-existing theoretical framework that integrated both caring and leadership resilience in the scenario of health catastrophes experienced in the population. Derivation of theories allowed reshaping and transforming the ideas of other fields, including organizational psychology and management of the crisis, in the context of nursing leadership. An existing theory of a parent was observed which was the Watson Theory of Human Caring to which the basic blocks of the concept, like intentional presence, holistic connection, and caring moments, were extracted(5).

Besides, resilience constructs were modified based on the leadership literature dealing with psychological hardiness, adaptive capacity, and self-efficacy. The constructs were then interpolated to the language of nursing leadership where it became applied to conceive of nursing leadership behaviors that ensure pride in maintaining emotional stability, team unity, and continuity of operations in emergent situations. The end product was a cross-theoretical framework that was faithful to the caring tradition of nursing, but blended in evidence-based tenets of leadership sciences.

Analysis and validation of theory

The last stage involved theory analysis which was more like a critical appraisal step that was intended to make the newly acquired theoretical model have internal coherence, applicability and empirical usefulness. In this case, the ideas were tested in terms of clarity, consistency, and congruence to the real nursing leadership practice. The components were contrasted with the actual realities that have been facing nurse leaders in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as staffing shortages, moral distress, emotional burnout, and clinical uncertainty.

The analysis of the theory also involved the corroboration between the variables in the theory including leadership behavior, organisational culture, team morale and patient outcomes. The informal interviews and reflective discussions with the practitioners i.e. nurse managers and educators were used to collect feedback. Their experience confirmed the relevance of the theory, especially the practicality of the concept of caring leadership moments and resilience-building interactions as effective constructs.

In order to further enhance theory rigor in the construction of the theory, the development of concepts was guided by guidelines espoused by Chinn and Kramer (1991) and Wilson (2009) on the topic of concept analyses(6). The methods helped delimit the domain and contextual specificities of such concepts as caring encounter, co-creation,

and caring-leading relationship by giving clear conceptual understanding that is critical in academic and practical usage.

Framework Developing and Conceptual Integration

The synthesis, derivation, and analysis of all processes led to the emergent framework development, which describes how caring behaviors can be fostered by nurse leaders simultaneously with the resilient health team built up in a situation of a public health crisis. This framework does not suggest that it should be unchanging and should only be applied in different healthcare contexts and as nurse leaders will continue to innovate to different situations that are dynamic and unpredictable.

The last theoretical framework details some major routes:

- Leader Self-Awareness and Reflective Practice: A focus on attention, emotion control, and purposive presence.
- Engaging Teams: Caring Encounters: Facilitating relational trust, psychological safety and shared decision-making.
- Institutional Support Mechanisms: An incorporation of training, mentorship, and policy changes to promote individual and collective resilience.
- Outcome-Based Metrics: aligning leadership activities with quality of patient care, staff retention and morale measures.

The conceptual outline presented in the theory provides nurse leaders and healthcare organizations access to fulfill the theory of compassionate governance in practice and achieve the best interests to maintain morale and performance until lasting emergencies take place.

3.Discussion

This research study used a structured methodology to develop theory such that caring and leadership resiliency in times of public health emergencies could be incorporated in a theoretically organized way and mainly contains the classic approach to theory development proposed by Walker and Avant (2005). Their model has been the most influential strategy in building a nursing theory, especially according to its clarity in describing the synthesis, derivation and analysis of theoretical concepts. These pillars of methodology were used as the base to establish a framework of consistent and context-specific theory to deal with the distinct issues that nurse leaders were presented with during the global health threats like the COVID-19 pandemic(7).

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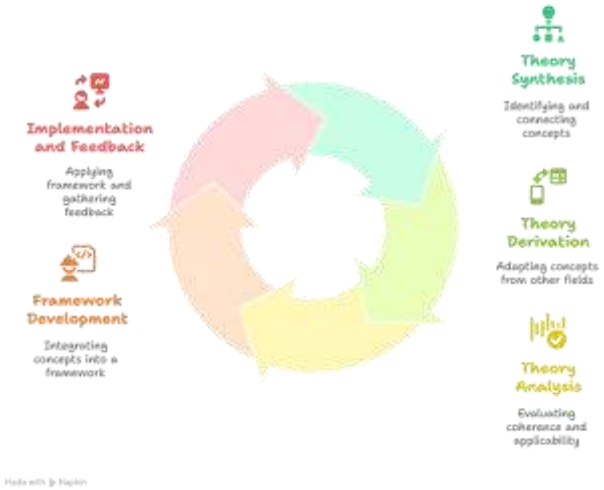

FIGURE 1 Cycle of Theory Development in Nursing Leadership

Analysis and validation of theory

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4.Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic acted as a wake-up call when the grave systemic vulnerabilities inherent in healthcare leadership were being revealed at the same time that nurse leaders demonstrated an unforeseen ability to continually adapt, to persist, and to infuse the experience with compassion in the face of overwhelming pressure. The emergent theory points to an essential paradigm shift in leadership definition and development of leadership in nursing-as a divergence of the tradition task-oriented leadership to a more humanistic, resilience-oriented and caring-centric one.

The very essence of this theoretical model is the deep sense of understanding that the compassion and resilience are not desirable properties that can be added or removed, as they are the fundamental elements of effective leadership during the crisis. The nurse leaders who exemplified these qualities did not only stabilize their departments, but they also influenced cultural and ethical environment of the facilities. This capacity in building safe, supportive and emotionally intelligent settings helped front line workers to wade through the tides of a health emergency with courage and clarity. The caring leadership that is a personal morality in this case is also a strategic tool in organizations.

The research supports the possibilities that resilience is not a matter of a few participants who have it, but a group phenomenon, a result of conditioning leadership action, environmental stimuli, and interpersonal factors. The areas through which resilience in leadership can be fostered include an emphasis on the well-being of staff, fostering psychological safety, strengths-based engagement, meaning-making via reflective practice. The development approach provides a positive message, a sense that individuals can develop further in a leadership role regardless of a crisis and could change an organization in a positive way.

Moreover, the framework given in this case supports the importance of integrated cooperation and multidisciplinary teamwork, ethical decision-making, and the availability of emotions as the first steps in crisis leadership. All these unite to allow nurse leaders to not only work as administrators in healthcare organization but rather as designers of healing environments, where both patients and healthcare professionals can seek safety, empathic understanding, and hope.

In the future, this emergent theory must be integrated into leadership development initiatives of healthcare institutions, their strategic planning, and crisis response strategies. Training ought to venture beyond the technical skills to emotional intelligence, mindfulness, team building and adaptive communication. In this way potential organizations will not only be ready to face future disasters when it comes to public health emergencies but also instill a leadership culture that can thrive on pressure without distorting its humanness.

Compassionate leadership and resilience building are things that cannot be left as fantasy any longer because it is practical, ethical and a professional requirement. The combination of these two focuses will not only enable nurse leaders to shield their people and patients but also establish a precedent of a more ethically sound and resilient healthcare system in a world moving towards uncertainty.

Acknowledgement: Nil

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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Volume 1, Issue 2 | November-2025

e-ISSN: 3068-6245 ISSN Print: 3068-6237

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