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PATHWAYS TO NURSING JOB PERFORMANCE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In healthcare settings, nurses serve as key customer-contact employees who reflect the organization's level of competence. Their attitudes and behaviours strongly shape patients' satisfaction and their overall perception of service quality. This study aimed to investigate how social support (consists of supervisor support and co-worker support) and work engagement relate to nurses' job performance. Data were obtained from two sources: staff nurses and their immediate supervisors (sisters). Staff nurses provided assessments of social support and work engagement, while their immediate supervisors evaluated the nurses' job performance. Of the 500 paired supervisee-supervisor questionnaires distributed, 420 were completed and returned, yielding an 84% response rate. Multiple regression analysis revealed that supervisor support had a positive effect on job performance, whereas support from co-workers and employees' work engagement showed no significant effect.

KEYWORDS: Job performance, social support, work engagement, COR theory, nurses.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Job performance is an essential component of organizational success as it indicates the effectiveness with which employees perform their roles, advance strategic objectives, and generate value for stakeholders. High job performance promotes productivity, minimizes waste, increases competitive advantage, and improves financial and operational outcomes (Motowidlo & Kell, 2012). In healthcare settings, nurses' performance is a crucial factor influencing patient safety, care quality, and overall hospital efficiency. High-performing nurses provide accurate and

compassionate care, foster teamwork, minimize medical errors, and improve patient outcomes (Baek et al., 2023; Lee & Seo, 2022). According to Greenslade and Jimmie son (2007), nursing performance consists of both task performance, which involves the essential clinical duties required of nurses, and contextual performance, which includes supportive and discretionary behaviours that enhance the work environment. They highlight that a comprehensive evaluation of nurses must consider not only technical skills but also the interpersonal and organizational contributions that improve overall healthcare delivery.

Healthcare organizations can enhance their understanding of the determinants affecting nurses' performance and develop strategies to improve care quality and safety by investigating its predictors. Social support and work engagement have identified as crucial criteria impacting nurses' job performance. Support from supervisors and co-workers offers resources, guidance, and emotional encouragement that assist nurses in managing high job demands and stressful environments (Sen & Yildirim, 2023; Nasurdin et al., 2018). Supportive supervisors enhance confidence, clarify expectations, and facilitate problem-solving, whereas co-worker support promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing. Van Bogaert et al. (2014) highlighted that work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, improves performance, as engaged nurses invest effort in both task-related and contextual activities that increase outcomes for patients and the organization. Studies found that increased social support and engagement correlate with enhanced performance, as nurses exceed their formal duties to support colleagues and enhance the overall workplace environment (Nasurdin et al., 2018; Sen & Yildirim, 2023).

Given these situations, this study aims to examine the influence of social support (consists of supervisor and co-workers) and work engagement on nurses' job performance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Job Performance

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) define job performance as "the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioural episodes that an individual carries out over a standard period of time" (p. 73). They distinguish between task performance, which includes behaviours that directly benefit the organization's technical core, and contextual performance, which contains actions that sustain and improve the social and psychological environment supporting that core. Job performance includes the behaviours exhibited by employees during work that facilitate the achievement of organizational goals and enhance effectiveness (Campbell, 1990; Motowidlo & Kell, 2012). It focuses on manageable tasks, highlighting employee performance and execution quality rather than solely on outcomes (Motowidlo & Kell, 2012; Campbell et al., 1993).

In the context of nursing, Greenslade and Jimmieson (2007) developed a framework for the healthcare sector derived from Borman and Motowidlo's (1993) theoretical model. Nursing performance can be categorized into task performance and contextual performance. Task performance includes the core duties required in a nurse's role, including the administration of medications, patient monitoring, execution of clinical procedures, and accurate documentation of care, demonstrating technical skills and compliance with professional standards (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Shi et al., 2023; Krijgsheld et al., 2022; Palenzuela et al., 2019). Meanwhile,

contextual performance involves discretionary behaviours that enhance the social and psychological work environment, including assisting colleagues, mentoring new employees, proactively addressing patient care concerns, and fostering a positive workplace climate (Aulia et al., 2022; Palenzuela et al., 2019; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). According to Cerit and Ekici (2023), contextual performance enhances teamwork, communication, and organizational cohesiveness, hence indirectly improving patient outcomes and healthcare quality. Nurses exhibiting better contextual performance are more likely to support colleagues, participate in collaborative problem-solving, and foster a resilient clinical environment, emphasizing its significance for both individual efficacy and the overall operation of healthcare systems (Palenzuela et al., 2019; Aulia et al., 2022).

2.2 Social Support

Workplace social support is typically characterized by the degree to which employees perceive the availability of assistance, guidance, and care from co-workers and supervisors, which enhances their well-being and work performance (Orgambidez et al., 2022). It consists of emotional support (empathy, encouragement), instrumental support (practical assistance), informational support (guidance, feedback), and appraisal support (recognition and affirmation). Supervisor support indicates the extent to which supervisors offer guidance, resources, and advocacy for employees, whereas co-worker support signifies the assistance, advice, and encouragement provided by peers (Sen & Yildirim, 2023; Sodeify & Habibpour, 2021). Collectively, these types of social support serve as crucial job resources that foster well-being, reduce stress, and improve overall job performance.

In nursing, social support from supervisors and coworkers is crucial due to the high-pressure and emotionally demanding nature of clinical work. Studies indicate that perceived support from supervisors and coworkers among nurses is positively associated with job performance outcomes. Support from supervisors, comprising feedback, resource accessibility, and guidance, has been found to enhance nurses' psychological well-being, engagement, and job performance (Sen & Yildirim, 2023; Othman & Nasurdin, 2012). While co-worker support, including workload assistance and knowledge sharing, enhances coping mechanisms, teamwork, and the quality of patient care (Sodeify et al., 2020; Velando Soriano et al., 2020). A Turkish study with 1,056 nurses revealed that support from supervisors and coworkers positively influenced job performance, mediated via psychological well-being; more support enhanced well-being, subsequently improving job performance (Sen & Yildirim, 2023). Another study among 196 Spanish nurses discovered that co-worker support correlated with higher vigor and vitality by reducing role ambiguity and increasing psychological flexibility. The findings indicated that supervisor support similarly mediated the impacts of vigor through role ambiguity, demonstrating that supportive work environments enhance nurses' motivation and engagement (Blanco-Donoso et al., 2019).

Although social support from supervisors and coworkers is often regarded as a crucial job resource for enhancing performance, empirical evidence indicates that the relationship may not consistently be direct or significant. In a Malaysian public-service study ($n = 316$), social support (which include supervisor and co-worker support) showed a positive correlation with job performance; however, only transformational leadership and emotional intelligence had significant effects in the model, while social support did not significantly predict performance (Md Din & Alias, 2023). Similarly, a

study consisting of 639 Malaysian nurses revealed that among perceived organizational support, supervisory support, and peer support, only peer support had a direct, positive effect on job performance, while supervisory and organizational support did not (Nasurdin et al., 2018). The findings indicate that although social support may influence performance, its effect is likely indirect or dependent on additional resources or mediators, and should not be presumed to yield a direct, strong impact on job performance across all contexts. Thus, from the above discussions, this study hypothesized that:

H1: Supervisor support is positively related to nurses' job performance.

H2: Co-worker support is positively related to nurses' job performance.

2.3 Work Engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive and fulfilling state of mind associated to work, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor indicates the presence of high energy and mental resilience in the workplace, dedication signifies an intense sense of involvement and pride in one's job, and absorption illustrates a state of complete immersion in work, resulting in the perception that time passes quickly. The concept of work engagement in nursing has become significant due to the high-demand, emotionally draining environments in which nurses operate, where the optimal allocation of energy, commitment, and attention is crucial for both individual and organizational outcomes. Research in nursing environments has shown that increased work engagement correlates with enhanced perceived care quality and reduced turnover intention (Falguera et al., 2023). Numerous research indicate that work engagement leads to enhanced job performance (e.g., Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Evidence demonstrates that employees who are engaged in their work perform better than those who are not engaged (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Furthermore, engaged individuals are known for investing their energy to their work tasks, leading to increased intensity and heightened focus on their obligations, ultimately resulting in improved performance (Rich et al., 2010). Given the significance of nursing performance on patient outcomes and organizational effectiveness, fostering work engagement in nursing is regarded as a strategic mechanism for improving job performance, enhancing patient safety, and decreasing turnover.

Despite work engagement is frequently assumed to improve job performance, several studies indicate that this relationship may not be straightforward. A large-scale study involving 3,296 participants revealed no clear linear relationship between work engagements as a predictor of job performance, indicating instead a curved trend (Inamizu & Makishima, 2018). Similarly in a study of 399 IT workers, work engagement did not significantly relate with job performance when individuals' psychological capital was low, illustrating the influence of moderating factors on engagement outcomes (Yao et al., 2022). In different contexts, such as local government employees in Malaysia, key components of employee engagement such as job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation were determined to have no significant impact on performance (Kamarlis et al., 2023). These findings indicate that although engagement can improve performance under certain circumstances, its effect may depend on individual, contextual, or job-related characteristics,

advising against assuming of a universally positive relationship between engagement and performance. Hence, based on prior discussion, we hypothesized that:

H3: Work engagement is positively related to nurses' job performance.

2.4 Underlying Theories

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The JD-R theory highlights the significance of job resources, including social support and engagement, in mitigating job demands and increasing motivation, whereas the COR theory emphasizes on how individuals acquire, retain, and protect resources to manage stress and enhance performance.

The JD-R theory proposes a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of job characteristics on employee well-being and performance. JD-R theory posits that each occupation possesses distinct job demands (e.g., workload, emotional strain, time pressure) and job resources (e.g., social support, autonomy, career growth), with the interaction between these categories influencing employee motivation and strain (Demerouti et al., 2001). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), job resources have a dual function: they buffer the negative effects of high job demands while simultaneously fostering engagement by promoting motivation and positive work behaviours. In healthcare environments, social support from coworkers and supervisors, as well as work engagement, serves as critical job resources that assist employees in managing challenging work conditions while increasing performance and well-being.

Complementing the JD-R theory, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) further explains how social support functions as a protective and generative resource in the nursing profession. The COR theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources, and that the presence of supportive resources helps mitigate the negative effects of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In organizational settings, social support and work engagement are considered critical resources that can enhance employee performance. Social support, which includes emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance from supervisors and colleagues, enables employees to manage stress and invest in activities that promote professional growth (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990; Kaufmann & Beehr, 1986). Similarly, engaged employees, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, are more likely to channel their energy into productive behaviours, resulting in higher job performance. When employees perceive strong social support and maintain high levels of engagement, they are better equipped to meet organizational demands, achieve objectives, and sustain well-being, ultimately enhancing overall performance outcomes (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000; Westman, Bakker, & Hobfoll, 2005).

In the nursing context, COR theory is particularly relevant because nurses frequently face high-stress environments, including heavy workloads, emotional demands, and critical patient care situations. According to JD-R theory, job resources such as social support and engagement buffer the negative effects of these demands and promote motivation, while COR theory highlights how these resources help nurses preserve and build personal and professional assets to cope with stress

(Demerouti et al., 2001; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Social support from supervisors, peers, and the broader healthcare team provides nurses with the resources needed to cope with these stressors, fostering work engagement and motivating them to perform their duties effectively (Sarason et al., 1990; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Engaged nurses demonstrate greater energy, commitment, and absorption in their work, which translates into higher job performance, improved patient care, and better organizational outcomes (Westman et al., 2005; Kaufmann & Beehr, 1986). Therefore, fostering supportive work environments and enhancing engagement are essential strategies for improving performance and well-being among nursing professionals.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Procedures and Samples

After approval from the Medical Research Ethics Committee (MREC) of the Malaysian Ministry of Health, a cross-sectional study was conducted in three public hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. Data were collected using a paired supervisee-supervisor questionnaire, with staff nurses assessing social support and work engagement and their immediate supervisors evaluating job performance. With the assistance of the Matron Offices, 500 paired questionnaires were distributed to staff nurses and their corresponding supervisors. The distribution and collection process took approximately one month, yielding 420 completed responses and a response rate of 84%.

3.2 Measurements

3.2.1 Job Performance

Job performance (in the form of contextual performance) was measured using 18 items developed by Green et al. (2007). Some sampled items include “This nurse is willing to spend extra time to respond to a patient’s needs”, “This nurse helps nurses in the unit to catch up on their work”, and “This nurse volunteers to participate on committees within the hospital that are not compulsory”. Respondents reported on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.91.

3.2.2 Social Support

A scale developed by Susskind, Kacmar, and Borchgrevink (2003) measured supervisor support (4 items) and co-worker support (3 items). The response format was based on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”). Cronbach’s alpha for these two types of supports was 0.95 and 0.94, respectively.

3.2.3 Work Engagement

Work engagement was assessed with the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The UWES-9 consists of three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption, each measured using three items. Example items are “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”, “I am enthusiastic about my”, and “I am immersed in my work”. All items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). This scale has a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.90.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 was used to conduct descriptive analysis. Internal consistency reliability of the measures was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the relationships between supervisor support, co-worker support, work engagement, and job performance.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Participants Profile

The 420 participants in this study were female nurses, representing 100% of the sample, with ages ranging from 23 to 56 years ($M = 36.34$, $SD = 7.92$). Most of the participants were married, accounting for 391 staff nurses (93.10%), while the remainder were unmarried. The majority of the nurses were of Malay ethnicity (97.38%), followed by Chinese (1.67%) and Indian (0.95%). On average, participants had 12.27 years of experience as staff nurses ($SD = 7.21$). The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	420	100
	Male	0	0
Marital Status	Married	391	93.10
	Unmarried	29	6.90
Ethnicity	Malay	409	97.38
	Chinese	7	1.67
	Indian	4	0.95
Age (yr.)	Mean	Standard Deviation	
	36.34	7.92	
Job Tenure (yr.)	12.27	7.21	

4.2 Reliability Results

The internal consistency of the scales used to measure the four variables was assessed through reliability analysis, with the results presented in Table 2. The reliability values for the scales varied from low to high. Specifically, the co-worker support scale demonstrated low reliability ($\alpha = 0.677$), while the supervisor support scale showed moderate reliability ($\alpha = 0.689$). In contrast, the job performance and work engagement scales exhibited high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.835 and 0.855, respectively. According to Ursachi, Alexandra, and Zait (2015), a Cronbach's alpha between 0.6 and 0.7 is considered acceptable, whereas a value of 0.8 or higher indicates very good reliability. Based on these criteria, the internal consistency values obtained in this study, ranging from 0.677 to 0.855, are considered acceptable to very good, indicating that the

items reliably measure the underlying constructs of job performance, supervisor support, co-worker support, and work engagement.

Table 2: Internal Consistency for Variables

Variable	No of Item	Internal Consistency (α)
Job Performance	18	0.835
Supervisor Support	4	0.689
Co-worker Support	3	0.677
Work Engagement	9	0.855

4.3 Multiple Regression Results

As shown in Table 3, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between supervisor support, co-worker support, work engagement, and job performance. The results indicate that only supervisor support had a significant positive effect on job performance ($\beta = 0.301$, $SD = 0.108$). The t -value was 1.993, with a corresponding p -value of 0.0047, which is below the 0.05 threshold, confirming the significance of the relationship. The 95% confidence interval for this effect ranged from 0.004 to 0.597, further supporting the consistency of the positive relationship. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as indicated by a VIF of 1.234 and a tolerance value of 0.810. Thus, H1 is supported. In contrast, co-worker support and work engagement did not significantly influence job performance. Co-worker support showed a positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.121$, $SD = 0.032$), but the relationship was not significant ($p = 0.555$). Similarly, work engagement had no significant effect ($\beta = -0.030$, $SD = 0.022$, $p = 0.664$). Hence, H2 and H3 are not supported. All predictors demonstrated acceptable collinearity, with VIF values well below 10 and tolerance values above 0.1, indicating the model was statistically adequate.

Overall, these findings suggest that supervisor support plays a significant role in enhancing job performance among nurses. Nurses who receive strong support from their supervisors are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and perform their job responsibilities effectively. In contrast, co-worker support and work engagement did not show a significant impact on job performance in this study.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Result
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.120 ^a	.014	.007	9.96461

a. Predictors: (Constant), WE, SVS, CWS

b. Dependent Variable: JP

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3	202.521	2.040	.108 ^b
	Residual	416	99.294		
	Total	419			

a. Dependent Variable: JP

b. Predictors: (Constant), WE, SVS, CWS

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Error	Std. Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	89.519	3.986		22.460	.000	81.684	97.353	
	SVS	.301	.151	.108	1.993	.047	.004	.597	.810
	CWS	.121	.204	.032	.590	.555	-.281	.522	.808
	WE	-.030	.068	-.022	-.434	.664	-.163	.104	.919

a. Dependent Variable: JP

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that only supervisor support had a significant and positive relationship with job performance. This result is consistent with previous studies, in general (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Sen & Yildirim, 2023) and particularly within the nursing context (Zahrah et al., 2019; Labrague et al., 2018; Al-Hamdan et al., 2017). For example, Al-Hamdan et al. (2017) discovered that supervisory support improves nurses' performance because supervisors are able to communicate effectively and clarify job expectations. A supportive workplace fosters high performance and sustains employees' commitment to their jobs. In the present study, a plausible explanation for the effect of supervisor support lies in the crucial role that supervisors play in nurturing nurses' emotional and psychological well-being. Supervisors who are approachable, empathetic, and responsive to nurses' emotional and psychological needs can mitigate job-related stress, workload demands, and fatigue. This support is particularly important in high-pressure environments such as healthcare. Thus, emotional support from supervisors allows nurses to remain committed, focused, and engaged in their tasks, subsequently improving their overall job performance.

Conversely, co-worker support and work engagement revealed no significant effect on nurses' job performance. Despite the findings inconsistent with the researcher's hypothesis, the results remain acceptable. Prior empirical research in this area have also demonstrated similar findings due to the dominant roles and influences of other predictors (Nasurdin et al., 2018; Mudallal et al., 2017; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). A study by Demerouti and Bakker (2011) discovered that co-worker support and engagement may not affect job performance in high-demand and high-pressure environments, such as nursing, unless hospital management effectively integrates job demands and

organizational support with employees' emotional needs. Although co-worker support and work engagement are not critical for nurses' job performance, they are plausible justifications for it. Co-worker support plays a limited role in a nurse's job duties. Nurses' responsibilities are typically regarded as individual tasks, with performance assessed based on individual accountability. This situation does not immediately impact the execution of nursing tasks or the outcomes of performance. The researchers believe that, despite nurses' strong engagement and commitment to their jobs, extrinsic variables such as excessive workload, rigid bureaucracy, and administrative demands may hinder their capacity to achieve high performance.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The significant effect of supervisor support on nurses' job performance has several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the positive effect of supervisor support reinforces the principles of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. This theory clarifies how the quality of the supervisor-nurse relationship influences important outcomes, such as job performance. Nurses who receive strong support from their supervisors are more inclined to perform well, in line with the fundamental LMX principle that employees demonstrate greater motivation and engagement when they foster a strong, supportive relationship with their direct supervisor (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). From a managerial perspective, the results indicate that hospital administrators should prioritize leadership development for supervisors in need of additional support. Such programs should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence, communication skills, transformational leadership capabilities, and supportive mentoring practices. These competences should enable supervisors to integrate emotional and psychological support for nurses into their everyday managerial practices.

The finding that co-worker support and work engagement did not significantly influence nurses' job performance indicates that emotional support from peers and intrinsic motivation may be insufficient to enhance performance in high-pressure healthcare settings. According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals are driven to obtain, retain, and protect resources that assist them in managing stress. Within the nursing profession, co-worker support and work engagement may not represent the most crucial resources for managing high job demands, potentially explaining their insignificant effect on job performance. Nurses may increasingly depend on other resources, such as support from supervisors, to preserve their emotional and psychological well-being and promote effective performance. Similarly, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) posits that job resources typically improve job performance. Nonetheless, the present results indicate that co-worker support and work engagement alone are unable to enhance performance outcomes. This suggests that although these resources may enhance nurses' general well-being, they do not directly result in increased job performance in high-pressure healthcare environments. From a managerial perspective, these findings highlight the need for hospital administrators to regard co-worker support primarily as a means of promoting emotional well-being rather than as a direct driver for job performance.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demonstrates that supervisor support significantly enhances nurses' job performance. This support can be achieved through supervisors' roles in offering guidance, promoting emotional stability, and cultivating a healthy work environment for nurses. On the contrary, co-worker support and work engagement seem to have no relationship with job performance, probably due to contextual and structural factors. Thus, fostering strong supervisory relationships may be a more effective strategy for improving nurses' performance. Nurses exhibit greater motivation and engagement when they have supportive relationships with their supervisors, therefore, hospital administrators should persist in investing in leadership development programs that respond to the emotional and psychological needs of their nurses.

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