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Towards creating an autonomy-supportive environment that strengthens the self-leadership practices of nurse educators

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Statement of the Problem: Most studies on autonomy support in educational settings focus on support environments provided by educators to motivate students for improved performance. However, little is known about how leaders in educational institutions can create an autonomy-supportive academic environment. It is also not known how leaders in academic nursing institutions create autonomy-supportive environments that enhance nurse educators' self-leadership practices. This study describes the methods used by the researcher to determine how "autonomy-supportive environment" emerged as a self-leadership practice construct in a study conducted with nurse educators working in nursing education institutions in South Africa.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: In a broader study, a sequential, exploratory and descriptive mixed-methods study was conducted to develop guidelines that could facilitate the self-leadership in nurse educators. However, this presentation will mainly focus on how "autonomy-supportive environment" emerged as a self-leadership practice construct, using descriptive quantitative methods.

Findings: Upon performance of an exploratory factor analysis, there were five factors (constructs) on the subscale C (self-leadership practices). Four of these constructs, namely "autonomy-supportive environment", "continuing professional development", "role modelling" and "shared leadership" were found to be meaningful and valid. This presentation reports on the factor autonomy-supportive environment, which had the highest Cronbach alpha coefficient in the subscale at 0.82.

Conclusion & Significance: The study describes the methods utilised to determine the emergence of autonomy-supportive environment as a self-leadership practice construct in a nursing education institution setting. When policymakers and the management of academic nursing institutions cultivate self-leadership among nurse educators, they improve the overall functioning of nursing education institutions. In turn, when nursing education institutions function optimally, they will produce nurses that are responsive and feel accountable to providing quality nursing care. Recommendations on how an academic institution can create an autonomy-supportive environment are proposed. Implications of an autonomy-supportive environment on policy are outlined.

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