

Relationship between head nurses' transformational leadership style and attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents in Hospitals

Cyrrilla Ayu Pamela^{1*}, Ahsan Ahsan², Viera Wardhani³

¹Master of Nursing Study Program, Faculty of Health Sciences, Brawijaya University
Exclusive Dieng Peak, Kunci, Kalisongo, Dau District, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

²Faculty of Health Sciences, Brawijaya University
Exclusive Dieng Peak, Kunci, Kalisongo, Dau District, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

³Faculty of Medicine, Brawijaya University
Lowokwaru, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

*Corresponding author : cyrillaapamela@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background : Patient safety is a top priority in healthcare services to prevent avoidable incidents and reduce the risk of medical errors. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that patient safety incidents are among the top ten leading causes of death and disability worldwide. However, the reporting rate for patient safety incidents remains low, reflecting a weak safety culture in hospitals. One factor influencing healthcare professionals' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents is leadership style. Transformational leadership is believed to enhance motivation, proactive behavior, and strengthen the safety culture in hospital settings.

Objectives : This study aims to analyze the relationship between head nurses' transformational leadership style and attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents in the inpatient wards of Kanjuruhan Regional General Hospital, Malang.

Methods : This study employed an analytical observational design with a cross-sectional approach. The sample consisted of 154 nurses working in inpatient wards, selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to assess transformational leadership and a questionnaire on attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. Data analysis was conducted using the Spearman Rank correlation test, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Results : The findings revealed that transformational leadership had a mean score of 4.03 ($SD = 0.504$), while attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting had a mean score of 3.94 ($SD = 0.429$). Spearman Rank correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting ($p = 0.000$, $r = 0.523$). This indicates that the higher the implementation of transformational leadership by the head nurse, the more positive the nurses' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents.

Conclusions : Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in improving attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting and fostering a stronger safety culture in hospitals. Therefore, leadership training for head nurses and the reinforcement of a non-punitive

incident reporting system are necessary to enhance healthcare professionals' engagement in incident reporting.

KEYWORD : *transformational leadership; patient safety incident; reporting attitude; safety culture; hospital*

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INTRODUCTION

Patient safety has become an important issue around the world because it plays a key role in improving the quality of healthcare. The global importance of patient safety in improving healthcare quality, highlighting patient safety incidents as major challenges in many countries (1). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), problems related to unsafe care are among the top ten causes of death and disability globally (2). When medical errors are not reported, it becomes harder to fix safety systems and prevent similar events in the future. Low incident reporting hinders efforts to improve patient safety systems and increases the risk of repeated events. It supports the importance of incident reporting as a critical component of quality improvement in healthcare. That's why patient safety continues to be a main focus for healthcare workers to ensure care is safe and effective (3). Even though many hospitals have implemented systems to report patient safety incidents, the number of reports is still low. In South Korea, reported adverse events more than doubled

from 2,586 in 2017 to 6,932 in 2020 (4). In Indonesia, data indicate that the number of reported patient safety incidents remains relatively low. In 2019, there were 7,465 reported patient safety incidents, consisting of 171 fatal cases, 80 cases of severe injury, 372 cases of moderate injury, 1,183 cases of minor injury, and 5,659 cases without injury (5). Although 2,877 hospitals have been accredited, only 12% of patient safety incidents were reported. Most of these were near-miss events (38%), no-harm incidents (31%), and unexpected incidents (31%) (6). The low reporting rate shows that the safety culture in Indonesian hospitals is still weak (7,8). Based on a preliminary study conducted at Kanjuruhan Regional Hospital, Malang Regency, it was found that in 2022 there were two reported patient safety incidents without injury (near misses), no incidents were reported in 2023, and one near miss was reported up to April 2024. The low number of reported patient safety incidents in Indonesia reflects a lack of reporting culture when such incidents occur. Low reporting rates of patient safety incidents in hospitals remain a major

challenge in improving healthcare quality. Several underlying factors contribute to this issue, including limited awareness of incident reporting systems, fear of being blamed or punished, the absence of feedback mechanisms, and a lack of time due to high workloads (9,10). Organizational culture also plays a key role, where the lack of support for transparency and learning from errors discourages reporting behavior (11). One important yet often overlooked factor is the leadership style of head nurses. Leadership that promotes open communication, trust, and empowerment such as transformational leadership has been shown to foster positive attitudes toward incident reporting among nurses (12). This suggests that transformational leadership not only influences team motivation but also shapes the overall culture of patient safety within hospital units. Leadership style is one of the main factors that affects how healthcare workers feel about reporting patient safety incidents. The head nurse, who leads the inpatient unit, has an important role in making sure staff follow safety procedures and report incidents properly (13). Transformational leadership is a leadership model that focuses on change, motivation, and inspiration, encouraging healthcare professionals to proactively enhance their performance in creating a safer work environment (14). Transformational leadership focuses on building a shared vision, motivating staff, and involving healthcare workers more in making decisions that help improve patient safety. Leaders who use this approach not only guide

their teams but also inspire them to think creatively and take part in improving safety practices (15). In hospitals, this type of leadership can help create a positive culture that supports reporting patient safety incidents by building trust in the reporting system (16). Several studies have demonstrated that transformational leadership has a positive impact on attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. A study conducted by Jufrizen et al. (2020) (14) found that this leadership style can boost healthcare workers' motivation to report patient safety incidents more actively. Although various studies have highlighted the positive influence of transformational leadership on patient safety incident reporting, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which this leadership style drives behavioral change among healthcare workers in hospitals. This study aims to explore the link between the head nurse's transformational leadership and healthcare workers' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents at Kanjuruhan Regional General Hospital, Malang. The results are expected to help hospital management develop better leadership strategies that can strengthen the culture of patient safety and encourage staff to report incidents more actively.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach to examine the relationship between the transformational leadership

style of head nurses (independent variable) and nurses' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents at Kanjuruhan Regional General Hospital, Malang. Each variable was measured using a Likert scale, and the scores were interpreted based on the following intervals: scores ranging from 1.00 to 1.79 were categorized as very low, 1.80 to 2.59 as low, 2.60 to 3.39 as moderate, 3.40 to 4.19 as high or good, and 4.20 to 5.00 as very high or excellent. The population consisted of 250 inpatient ward nurses. Using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, 154 nurses were selected through purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria (inpatient ward nurses willing to participate which included inpatient ward nurses who were willing to participate, had a minimum of one year of work experience, and were currently employed at the hospital during the data collection period. Exclusion criteria included nurses on leave and head nurses. This study was conducted between November and December 2025 for the data collection process. The research began with obtaining ethical approval and a formal research permit. The researcher explained the study procedures and questionnaire to the respondents, followed by distributing the informed consent forms.

After the respondents completed the questionnaires, the researcher proceeded with data analysis. The instruments used to measure transformational and transactional leadership styles were based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), and their validity was tested by the researcher,

yielding correlation values ranging from 0.481 to 0.924. The instrument used to assess attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents also demonstrated validity, with correlation values ranging from 0.393 to 0.843. Since all calculated *r*-values exceeded the critical *r*-table value of 0.361, both instruments were deemed valid. Reliability testing showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.943 for the transformational leadership variable and 0.897 for the attitude toward incident reporting variable (≥ 0.60), indicating that both instruments were reliable and consistent for use in data collection.

Univariate analysis was used to describe respondent characteristics, while bivariate analysis with the Spearman Rank test assessed the relationship between leadership style and reporting attitudes. A *p*-value <0.05 indicated statistical significance. The study received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Kanjuruhan Hospital (No. 072.1/EA.KEPK-054/35.07.302.101/2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study was conducted in the inpatient wards of Kanjuruhan Regional General Hospital, Malang. The findings cover respondent characteristics, transformational leadership style, attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting, and the relationship between the head nurse's transformational leadership style and attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. The results of

univariate and bivariate analyses are presented in the following tables.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Based on Age (N=154)

Characteristics	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min-Max
Age	35.89	7.2	24-52

Table 1 presents the age distribution of respondents. The average age of the respondents was 35.89 years, with the youngest being 24 years old and the oldest 52 years old.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics Based on Gender, Education Level, and Work Experience (N=154)

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	42	27.3
Female	112	72.7
Education Level		
Diploma 3 (D3)	105	68.2
Diploma 4 (D4)	2	1.3
Bachelor's (S1)	2	1.3
Nurse	45	29.2
Work Experience		
< 5 years	59	38.3
5-10 years	33	21.4
> 10 years	62	40.3

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 2 details the respondents' characteristics based on gender, education level, and years of experience. The results indicate that 112 respondents (72.7%) were female, while 42 respondents (27.3%) were male, suggesting that the nursing workforce in the inpatient wards of Kanjuruhan Regional General Hospital is predominantly female. Regarding education level, the majority of

respondents held a Diploma 3 (D3) in Nursing (68.2%), while a smaller proportion had a Diploma 4 (D4) or a Bachelor's degree in Nursing (S1), each accounting for 1.3% of the sample. Additionally, 45 respondents (29.2%) had completed the Nurse Professional Program. Based on work experience, 62 respondents (40.3%) had more than 10 years of experience, indicating that a significant proportion of nurses in the inpatient wards had substantial professional experience. Meanwhile, 59 respondents (38.3%) had less than five years of experience, and 33 respondents (21.4%) had between five and ten years of experience. This variation in work experience highlights the presence of both early-career and experienced nurses in the hospital's inpatient wards.

Table 3 presents the distribution of transformational leadership styles and attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. The mean score for transformational leadership style was 4.03, with a standard deviation of 0.504. The minimum and maximum scores were 2.00 and 3.00, respectively, indicating that most respondents rated the head nurse's transformational leadership style as high to very high. Regarding attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting, the mean score was 3.94, with a standard deviation of 0.429. The minimum and maximum scores were both 5.00, suggesting that the majority of healthcare professionals had a positive and proactive attitude toward reporting patient safety incidents. These findings reflect a well-established safety culture within the hospital

Table 3. Distribution of Transformational Leadership Style and Attitudes Toward Patient Safety Incident Reporting (N=154)

Variable	N	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Deviation
Transformational Leadership Style	154	4.03	2	3	0.504
Attitudes Toward Patient Safety Incident Reporting	154	3.94	5	5	0.429

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 4. Spearman Rank Correlation Test Results for Transformational Leadership Style and Attitudes Toward Patient Safety Incident Reporting (N=154)

Variable	P-value	r
Transformational Leadership Style	0.000	0.523
Attitudes Toward Patient Safety Incident Reporting		

Source: Primary Data, 2024

environment.

Table 4 the relationship between transformational leadership style and attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting was analyzed using the Spearman Rank correlation test. The results in Table 4 show a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($p < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.523$) suggests a strong positive correlation, meaning that higher implementation of transformational leadership by the head nurse is associated with more positive and proactive attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. This positive correlation implies a direct relationship, where an increase in transformational leadership practices enhances the likelihood of nurses actively reporting patient safety incidents.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that most respondents were in the adult age category, supporting previous findings that

stated that the 36-45 year age range dominates the murder profession. This can be seen in **Table 1**. Adulthood is often associated with greater emotional stability and better decision-making abilities in clinical situations. Age is associated with patient safety, as it influences an individual's ability to perform tasks, respond to various situations, and enhance their capability in fulfill responsibilities effectively (17). In this context, age plays a role in nurses' attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting.

However, Camacho-Rodríguez et al. (2022) emphasized that the impact of age does not stand alone; perceptions of patient safety are also strongly influenced by training and exposure to effective reporting systems (1). Therefore, this study should further explore whether age independently affects attitudes or is influenced by other factors such as education and work experience. Regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female. This can be seen in **Table 2**. This result aligns with previous

research, which found that women are more likely to face incivility in the workplace, which can lower their confidence in reporting incidents (18). As a result, even though women may dominate in numbers, their effectiveness in reporting may be hindered by unsupportive social and organizational environments.

For educational background, the majority of respondents held a Diploma 3 (D3) in Nursing. This can be seen in **Table 2**. This finding is supported by previous studies showing a direct statistical relationship between perceived quality of care and education level, indicating that nurses' perception of care quality improves with higher education levels (19). According to Alhumaid et al. (2021), a higher level of education is significantly linked to better compliance with safety protocols, driven by improved theoretical understanding and practical application (20). An improved perception of care quality influences nurses in reporting patient safety incidents occurring in hospital wards.

Regarding work experience, 40.3% of respondents had more than 10 years of experience, suggesting that a significant proportion of nurses have extensive clinical experience. This can be seen in **Table 2**. These findings are consistent with Faridah et al. (2021) and Pool et al. (2024), who stated that longer work experience is generally associated with a deeper understanding of patient safety systems (21,22). However, Rossi et al. (2023) argued that experience

alone does not always ensure safe practices, especially without strong managerial support and ongoing training (23). More experienced healthcare professionals are better equipped to recognize the importance of patient safety incident reporting as part of service quality improvement(22).

The descriptive analysis showed that transformational leadership had a mean score of 4.03 with a standard deviation of 0.504, categorizing it as high to very high. This can be seen in **Table 3**. This indicates that head nurses in the hospital apply a leadership style that inspires, motivates, and supports staff development, particularly in promoting a patient safety culture related to incident reporting (24). Transformational leadership emphasizes building relationships with employees and driving change by embedding values that motivate and inspire staff to enhance service quality through attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors(25). Additionally, transformational leadership has been shown to improve healthcare workers' compliance with patient safety protocols(26).

For patient safety incident reporting attitudes, the mean score was 3.94, with a standard deviation of 0.429, indicating that most healthcare professionals exhibit a positive attitude toward reporting patient safety incidents. This can be seen in **Table 3**. This reflects the implementation of a strong safety culture within the hospital. Patient safety incident reporting is a critical first step in enhancing overall patient safety (27,28). Unfortunately, as highlighted by Fekadu et al.

(2025), incident reporting may not reflect an effective system if there is no feedback mechanism or protection for the person reporting the incident (3). Attitudes toward reporting are individual reactions that influence actions and behaviors, both directly and indirectly, in reporting patient safety incidents, often accompanied by positive or negative emotions (29,30). A study by Jufrizen et al. (2020) also found that supportive leadership that provides positive motivation can enhance compliance with patient safety incident reporting (14).

The Spearman Rank correlation test demonstrated a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and patient safety incident reporting attitudes (p -value < 0.05). This can be seen in **Table 4**. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.523$) suggests a strong and positive relationship between the two variables. This means that the independent variable contributes 27.3% to the variation observed in the dependent variable, while the remaining 72.7% is likely influenced by other factors not analyzed in this study. The greater the implementation of transformational leadership by the head nurse, the more positive the nurses' attitudes become toward reporting patient safety incidents. These findings align with a study by Padauleng, Sidin, and Ansariadi (2020), which found that transformational leadership positively influences the development of a patient safety culture associated with incident reporting attitudes (31). Jufrizen et al. (2020) also found that supportive leaders are able to

foster a culture that encourages incident reporting (14). Leaders who adopt transformational leadership styles, combined with motivating employees to achieve excellence, can positively impact work performance (32). Furthermore, research by Faridah et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between leadership and patient safety culture (22). Other studies have also emphasized that patient safety culture is strongly linked to incident-reporting behaviors. A strong patient safety culture leads to better patient safety incident reporting, whereas a weaker safety culture is associated with lower reporting rates (33).

The findings of this study indicate a significant positive relationship between head nurses' transformational leadership style and nurses' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents. Transformational leaders tend to create a supportive work environment, encourage open communication, and foster trust and intrinsic motivation among nurses. This is consistent with the study by Hamdan et al. (2024), which demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly enhances both patient safety culture and safety practices among nurses. Moreover, their study confirmed that patient safety culture serves as a mediating factor, strengthening the impact of leadership on safety-related behaviors (34).

Similarly, Wahyudyasa et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership had the most dominant effect on developing a strong safety culture in hospitals. Their results

showed that 45.4% of the variance in patient safety culture could be explained by transformational leadership style, although nurse competence did not significantly moderate this effect (35) findings align with this study's results, suggesting that the stronger the transformational leadership of the head nurse, the more positive nurses' attitudes become toward reporting incidents, as they feel supported rather than blamed.

In contrast, the study by Gqaleni and Mkhize (2024) in South Africa highlighted that a lack of managerial support and the presence of a punitive culture were major barriers to incident reporting. Nurses expressed fear of disciplinary action and reported a lack of feedback from leadership as key reasons for underreporting, even though they had adequate knowledge of the reporting procedures (36). These findings reinforce the notion that transformational leadership not only motivates but must also provide a safe, non-punitive system to ensure effective incident reporting.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in improving attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. Leaders who inspire, support, and motivate healthcare professionals can create a work environment conducive to fostering a stronger patient safety culture. Therefore, strategies to enhance transformational leadership through training programs and regular evaluations are essential to strengthening the patient safety culture within

hospitals. Developing structured leadership programs aimed at improving communication, motivation, and teamwork could further enhance patient safety outcomes.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study must be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures data at only one point in time, which makes it impossible to determine causal relationships between leadership style and reporting attitudes. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires can introduce social desirability bias, where participants may respond in a way that seems socially acceptable rather than based on their actual experiences. Third, the study was conducted in only one regional hospital, which limits the generalizability of the results to other institutions with different work cultures, management systems, and demographic profiles.

Lastly, other contextual factors that may influence reporting attitudes such as workload, administrative pressure, past experience with reporting, and perceptions of system effectiveness were not included in the analysis. Therefore, future studies using longitudinal designs, multi-site approaches, and multivariate analysis are needed to gain a more comprehensive and generalizable understanding of the factors influencing incident reporting attitudes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates a significant relationship between the head nurse's

transformational leadership style and attitudes toward patient safety incident reporting. The correlation is positive, indicating that the greater the implementation of transformational leadership, the more favorable nurses' attitudes toward reporting patient safety incidents. The majority of respondents rated transformational leadership as high and exhibited a positive attitude toward incident reporting.

As a recommendation, hospitals should strengthen training programs for head nurses to enhance their ability to implement transformational leadership effectively. Additionally, regular awareness campaigns should be conducted to emphasize the importance of incident reporting without fear of consequences or sanctions. The optimization of digital reporting systems is also recommended to improve the efficiency and accuracy of incident reporting. Future research should explore other factors influencing incident reporting to support the continuous improvement of patient safety culture in healthcare settings.

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