

Head Nurse Supervision as an Effective Strategy to Improve Nursing Retention and Performance

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ABSTRACT

Suboptimal supervision by ward heads has been identified as a contributing factor to low retention and high turnover among hospital nurses. Strengthening supervisory practices is therefore essential to enhance performance, job satisfaction, and workforce stability within nursing services. This study aims to analyze the influence of ward head supervision on job satisfaction and organizational commitment among hospital nursing staff. This systematic literature review employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework and the PICOT strategy. Literature searches were conducted through Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Gale using keywords related to ward head supervision, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and hospital settings. The review followed a rigorous and structured process, including critical appraisal using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) to assess methodological quality. From the 15 articles reviewed, most studies demonstrated that ward head supervision and leadership exert a positive influence on nurse performance, quality of work life, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Structured, supportive, and development-oriented supervision was shown to reduce burnout, improve compliance with standard operating procedures, and strengthen nurse retention. However, the effectiveness of supervision is highly dependent on the quality, consistency, and contextual appropriateness of its implementation. In conclusion, ward head supervision and leadership play a pivotal role in improving nurse performance, adherence to standard operating procedures, and patient safety. Supportive and well-structured supervisory practices, combined with effective leadership, contribute significantly to service quality and the overall well-being of nurses in hospital settings.

Keywords: Ward head supervision; Nurse job satisfaction; Nursing service quality.

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals function as essential healthcare institutions that provide curative, promotive, and referral services aimed at restoring health status, improving overall well-being, and ensuring continuity of care for patients. Their fundamental purpose is to deliver healthcare services that align with the needs and expectations of clients across multiple dimensions, including the quality of medical and non-medical services, procedural efficiency, cost transparency, and the availability of supportive information. Within this framework, patient safety constitutes a primary priority and a core responsibility of nurses who deliver care across various service units, both within hospital structures and community-based settings [1].

Nurses serve as the central human resource in healthcare delivery, and their performance is significantly shaped by the supervisory practices of ward heads. Effective supervision by nurse managers has been shown to influence team performance, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of nursing care [2]. Empirical evidence demonstrates a weak-to-moderate positive correlation between ward head supervision and nurse job satisfaction ($r = 0.370-0.485$), as well as organizational commitment ($r = 0.606-0.609$), based on studies conducted in public and private hospitals in Serang, Banten. Despite this, the overall level of job satisfaction among nurses in Indonesia remains within the "moderately satisfied" category and has not reached the optimal threshold of $\geq 90\%$, largely due to excessive workload demands and low intrinsic motivation [3].

Nurse retention and turnover continue to pose substantial challenges in hospital nursing workforce management. Multiple studies in Indonesia report that annual nurse turnover rates remain relatively high, ranging from approximately 12% to more than 30% in several hospitals. Such instability directly affects service continuity, increases the workload of remaining staff, and compromises the quality of nursing care delivered to patients [4]. Furthermore, available data indicate that not all nurses are able to remain in their positions during the first 1–3 years of employment [2,5]. This early employment period is particularly critical, as nurses who do not receive adequate managerial support or who work in unsupportive environments are more likely to resign, request unit transfers, or choose not to renew their employment contracts. High rates of resignation and contract non-renewal reflect low workforce stability and highlight systemic issues within nursing management [5].

One of the key factors contributing to these challenges is the effectiveness of ward head supervision. Supervisory practices that are inconsistent, unstructured, or insufficiently focused on coaching and performance feedback can diminish nurse motivation and job satisfaction [2,3]. Over time, these deficiencies contribute to reduced retention and increased turnover among nursing staff. The effectiveness of a ward head in implementing a team-focused managerial approach is strongly influenced by their personal competencies and professional commitment. Their ability to optimize team performance becomes crucial through structured orientation, continuous learning opportunities, regular evaluation of individual competencies, and equitable task allocation based on staff expertise. As role models, ward heads are responsible for ensuring that supervision functions as a systematic oversight mechanism that aligns daily nursing activities with established plans, guidelines, policies, and organizational goals.

Given these considerations, strengthening the implementation of effective ward head supervision is essential as a strategic effort to enhance nurse retention, reduce turnover, and maintain workforce stability and performance within hospital settings. The primary purpose of unit-level supervision is to improve nurse performance through constructive feedback, equitable and non-discriminatory treatment, trust-building, and motivational support. Such an approach encourages staff nurses to deliver high-quality nursing care, supported by routine evaluations that emphasize continuous performance improvement [6].

Aligned with the issues identified in the background and the evidence summarized in the abstract, the present study is designed with the following objective: to analyze the influence of ward head supervision on nurse job satisfaction and organizational commitment in hospital settings, with particular attention to how structured, supportive, and development-oriented supervisory practices contribute to workforce stability, performance enhancement, and the overall quality of nursing services. Effective supervision by nurse managers is therefore a critical determinant of both staff performance and well-being. In this context, the study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of how supervisory practices shape key workforce outcomes and to provide evidence-based insights that may guide managerial improvements within hospital nursing units.

METHODS

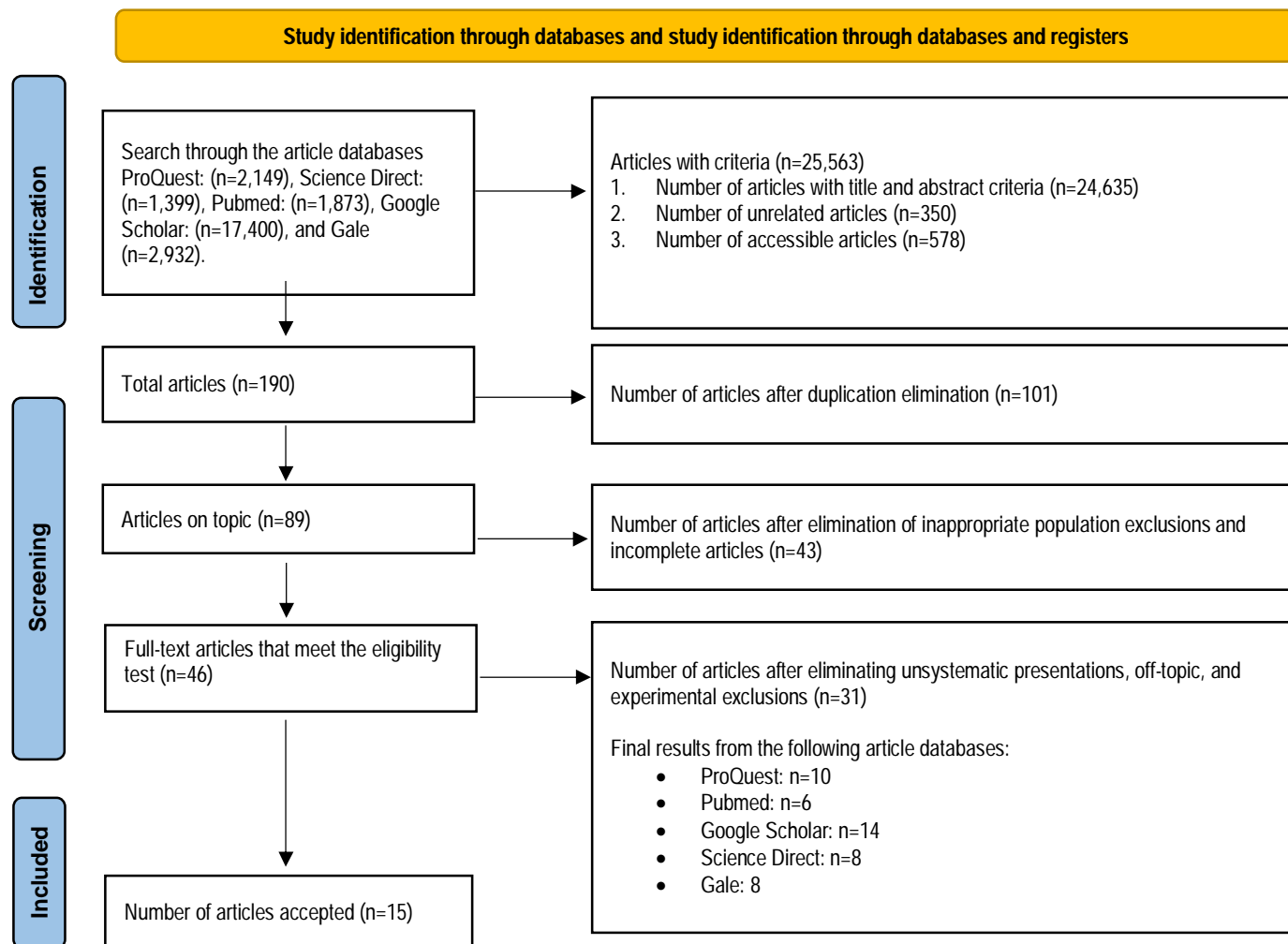
The method employed in this study was a systematic literature review designed in accordance with the PRISMA framework (Figure 1) and guided by the PICOT formulation, following the academic standards commonly applied in nursing science programs in Indonesia. This methodological approach involved a structured and sequential process consisting of four principal phases, namely identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies. During the identification phase, the researcher conducted comprehensive searches across multiple electronic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, Gale, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect, focusing on literature related to nurse supervision, ward head managerial practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and nursing service quality.

The review process began with the formulation of a clear research question, followed by the systematic identification of relevant literature. All retrieved records were then subjected to an initial screening based on titles and abstracts to determine their alignment with the research focus. Articles that passed this stage proceeded to the eligibility phase, during which full-text assessments were conducted using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This step ensured that only studies meeting methodological and topical relevance were retained. The final phase involved the inclusion of eligible studies, mapping of extracted data, and synthesis of findings into a coherent narrative.

The literature search strategy incorporated expert consultation and applied the PICOT approach to refine the scope of inquiry. Boolean operators, particularly "AND," were used to enhance the precision of database searches. The primary keywords employed were "Supervisi" AND "Head nurse" AND "quality," ensuring that the search captured studies addressing supervisory practices and their implications for nursing quality outcomes. Searches were conducted across PubMed, Wiley Gale, ProQuest, and Google Scholar to ensure comprehensive coverage of both international and regional publications.

The inclusion criteria for this review were established to ensure the relevance and rigor of the selected studies. Eligible articles were required to meet the following conditions: the study objectives explicitly examined the outcomes of ward head supervision and nursing quality; the articles were published in either English or Indonesian; the research was empirical in nature, employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs; the publication period fell between 2020 and 2026; and the sample size consisted of more than 30 nurse respondents. Conversely, exclusion criteria eliminated studies employing randomized controlled trial designs, systematic reviews, narrative literature reviews, or meta-analyses; studies involving non-nurse populations; studies with unclear or insufficient sample sizes (<30 respondents); and publications dated prior to 2019.

Following the application of these criteria, all selected articles underwent a critical appraisal process using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This appraisal ensured that each study met acceptable standards of methodological validity, credibility, and relevance to the research objectives. The final synthesis integrated the findings from the included studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of ward head supervision on nurse job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and nursing service quality.



*Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).

**If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for article selection

RESULTS

Based on the results of the article selection process, the initial stage of database searching using predetermined keywords yielded a total of 25,563 records that met the broad identification criteria. Following this, title- and abstract-based screening reduced the pool to 24,635 articles, after which 350 articles were excluded for being unrelated to the research topic. From the remaining records, only 578 articles were accessible in full text. A subsequent duplication check further refined the dataset to 101 unique articles.

The eligibility assessment continued with the removal of studies that did not meet the population criteria or that lacked complete information, resulting in 43 eligible articles. Additional exclusions were made for studies that presented non-systematic findings, were misaligned with the topic, or employed experimental designs inconsistent with the review criteria, leaving a total of 31 articles for deeper evaluation. The distribution of articles across databases at this stage was as follows: ProQuest (n = 10), PubMed (n = 6), Google Scholar (n = 14), ScienceDirect (n = 8), and Gale (n = 8).

After applying the full set of inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 15 articles were found to be fully aligned with the objectives and methodological requirements of the study, particularly those guided by the PICOT framework. These final articles were then subjected to critical appraisal using the CASP checklist to ensure methodological rigor, relevance, and credibility. The resulting dataset formed the evidentiary foundation for synthesizing the influence of ward head supervision on nurse job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and the broader quality of nursing services.

Table 1. The results of synthesis

No	Title	P (population)	I (intervention)	C (comparison)	O (outcome)	T (time)
1	Effect of total quality management intervention on nurse commitment and nurse performance [7]	The population consisted of 140 nurses selected using proportional stratified random sampling; 132 completed the study (67 intervention, 65 control). Nurses were from emergency, ICU, surgical, medical, obstetric-gynecologic, and pediatric units in Jordanian public hospitals.	A quasi-experimental multiple time-series design. The intervention group received comprehensive TQM training covering organization, information, and quality management, including Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain, and KAIZEN. Measurements were taken pre-intervention, one month, and six months post-intervention.	The control group received no TQM intervention and only underwent standard pretest–posttest–follow-up procedures.	Significant time-group interaction ($F(4,127)=144.841, p=.001, \eta^2=.820$). MANCOVA confirmed improvements in performance and commitment ($F(2,127)=320.724, p=.001, \eta^2=.835$). Improvements persisted through follow-up.	September 2017 – June 2018 (pretest, 1-month posttest, 6-month follow-up).
2	Program improvement kendali mutu dan kendali biaya pada pasien paliatif oleh kepala ruangan [8]	Palliative patients at RSUPN Dr. Cipto Mangunkusumo, characterized by high cost (90% over budget), high volume (170 visits), and high risk (LOS 7–29 days).	Implementation of quality- and cost-control guidelines and monitoring checklists by ward heads using Kurt Lewin's change model and POSAC functions.	Standard practice prior to intervention, lacking clear SOPs, weak communication, and no monitoring checklist.	Improved quality control (>83.3% SOP compliance), improved team communication (>66.7%), reduced over-budget spending, shorter LOS, and strengthened CQI.	One-month mini-project (2 September –2 October 2024).
3	Hubungan supervisi kepala ruangan dengan kualitas pendokumentasian asuhan keperawatan di instalasi rawat inap RS Juanda Kuningan [9]	54 staff nurses in the inpatient unit (total sampling).	Observation of existing ward head supervision categorized as good, moderate, or poor.	Comparison across supervision categories (no separate control group).	Significant relationship between supervision and documentation quality. 70.4% had high-quality documentation.	Cross-sectional study conducted in 2023.
4	Pengaruh supervisi kepala ruangan terhadap kinerja perawat pelaksana di ruang rawat inap Rumah Sakit Umum Wira Husada Kisaran [6]	86 staff nurses (total sampling).	Managerial supervision functions: planning, organizing, guiding, directing, supervising, evaluating, reporting.	Implicit comparison of high vs. low supervision levels via regression.	Significant effects of planning, supervision, evaluation, and reporting on performance. Reporting had the strongest coefficient.	Cross-sectional data collection in 2025.
5	Leadership style of head nurses against job satisfaction and organizational commitment of staff nurses [1]	501 nurses from two hospitals in Serang.	Questionnaire assessing transformational and transactional leadership.	No explicit control group.	Significant differences in leadership style perceptions between hospitals; leadership associated with job satisfaction and commitment.	2021

No	Title	P (population)	I (intervention)	C (comparison)	O (outcome)	T (time)
6	Kepemimpinan efektif kepala ruangan dalam menurunkan burnout syndrome perawat di rumah sakit [10]	43 inpatient nurses at a private Islamic hospital.	Questionnaire on effective leadership and burnout.	No comparison group.	Strong negative correlation between leadership and burnout ($r = -0.680$, $p = 0.001$).	2021
7	Understanding Nurse Workload, Work Stress and Supervision on Influence of Clinical Performance [11]	150 clinical nurses (total sampling).	Questionnaire on workload, stress, and supervision; SEM-AMOS analysis.	No control group.	Workload and supervision positively affected performance; stress negatively affected performance ($p < 0.05$).	2020
8	The effect of Nursing supervision based on proctor's model on improving the quality of nursing work life of nurses after rotation [12]	30 rotated nurses (total sampling).	Proctor-based clinical supervision; pre-post QNWL questionnaire.	No control group.	Significant improvement in all QNWL dimensions ($p < 0.05$).	2022
9	Relationship between head nurse leadership and nurses' burnout: parallel mediation of job demands and job resources among clinical nurses [13]	579 registered nurses in Hunan.	Online cross-sectional survey via WeChat.	No control group.	Leadership negatively predicted burnout; job demands and job resources acted as parallel mediators.	March–June 2024
10	Pengaruh model supervisi klinik terhadap kinerja perawat dalam asuhan keperawatan di instalasi rawat inap 2 rumah sakit [2]	88 nurses and 96 documents.	Quasi-experimental pre-post design with training.	Control group included.	Significant improvement in nursing performance ($p = 0.000$).	2025
11	Effectiveness analysis of clinical supervision models in improving the clinical nurse performance [14]	57 analyzed respondents from 128 distributed questionnaires.	Questionnaire based on clinical supervision theory.	Comparative analysis across supervision models.	No significant differences in performance ($F = 1.017$, $p = 0.407$).	September 2019 – February 2020
12	The supervision and transformational leadership styles on nurses' compliance in prevention and control of infection risks at a hospital in Kotamobagu, Indonesia [3]	72 nurses.	Two questionnaires: supervision and transformational leadership.	No control group.	Significant relationship between supervision, leadership, and compliance ($p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.336$).	August 2022
13	Effects of length of employment and head nurse leadership style on the clinical competency of staff nurses in Taiwan [15]	200 nurses (cluster sampling).	MLQ and Clinical Competency Scale.	No control group.	Transformational leadership significantly correlated with clinical competency; employment length also significant.	2024
14	Nursing manager leadership for developing professional and commitment a novice nurse in hospital [16]	Novice nurses (<2 years experience).	MLQ-5X assessing leadership styles.	No control group.	Mean organizational commitment = 3.95; highest in affective dimension (4.08).	2025
15	Hubungan supervisi kepala ruangan dengan penerapan SOP pencegahan risiko jatuh [4]	50 nurses.	Questionnaire and observation sheet.	No control group.	Significant correlation between supervision and fall-prevention SOP compliance ($r = 0.575$, $p = 0.00$).	April 2025

DISCUSSION

A comprehensive review of the fifteen selected articles demonstrates that ward head supervision and leadership constitute strategic determinants in enhancing nurse performance, quality of work life, organizational commitment, and overall workforce stability. Across diverse methodological designs and clinical settings, the findings consistently affirm that structured, supportive, and development-oriented supervisory approaches exert a positive influence on multiple indicators of nursing quality. Based on the synthesized recommendations from these studies, hospitals in Indonesia are encouraged to adopt integrated nursing leadership strategies to strengthen performance outcomes and improve nurse retention.

Supervision of ward heads and nurse performance

The majority of the reviewed studies indicate that ward head supervision significantly influences the performance of staff nurses. When supervision is conducted consistently and effectively, nurses tend to demonstrate higher levels of competence in delivering nursing care, as supported by several studies [17–19]. Additional evidence from other investigations [2,11] confirms that supervisory functions, particularly planning, monitoring, evaluation, and documentation/reporting enhance compliance with standard operating procedures (SOPs), improve the quality of nursing documentation, and reinforce patient safety practices. Among these functions, documentation and reporting emerge as the most dominant components, as they ensure accountability, continuity of care, and traceability of clinical decisions.

However, not all supervisory functions exert equal influence. Certain managerial components, such as organizing and directing, were found to be non-significant or even negatively associated with performance when not accompanied by effective coaching. This suggests that supervision that is purely administrative, without educational or supportive elements, is insufficient to optimize nurse performance. Strengthening effective supervision and ensuring workplace safety have been shown to contribute to improved nurse performance [20]. Consequently, hospitals are advised to enhance supervisory quality and cultivate a safe working environment to ensure optimal nursing performance.

Clinical supervision and quality of nursing work life

Study findings from article [12] consistently demonstrate that Proctor-based clinical supervision significantly improves the Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL), particularly among nurses undergoing rotation. Following structured supervisory interventions, the proportion of nurses reporting high QNWL increased markedly, while those in the poor category declined to zero [21]. These results highlight the value of supervision that incorporates restorative, formative, and normative functions, enabling nurses to adapt to new work environments, reduce emotional stress, and achieve better balance between work and personal life. Thus, supervision influences not only technical performance but also the psychosocial well-being of nurses.

Ward head leadership, burnout, and work stress

Several articles emphasize the relationship between ward head leadership and nurse burnout. Studies [10] and [13] report a strong negative association between effective leadership and burnout syndrome, indicating that the more effective the leadership, the lower the levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among nurses. Leaders who provide clear direction, emotional support, and effective communication help nurses manage workplace pressures more effectively.

Furthermore, studies [11,22] demonstrate that supervision serves as a protective factor against the negative effects of work stress on performance. Effective supervision mitigates the detrimental impact of stress even under high workload conditions, enabling nurses to maintain satisfactory clinical performance [10,23]. These findings underscore the importance of leadership and supervision as buffers against occupational stressors.

Leadership style and organizational commitment

Evidence from articles [10,16] and [15] shows that transformational leadership among ward heads is positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and clinical competence. Affective commitment emerges as the strongest dimension, suggesting that nurses remain in their organizations due to emotional attachment fostered by inspirational and participatory leadership. Among novice nurses, managerial leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational commitment during the early years of employment—a period known to be critical for turnover. Thus, leadership behaviors that guide, mentor, and engage nurses significantly influence both organizational commitment and the quality of nursing care delivered [24,25].

Supervision, SOP compliance, and patient safety

Studies [3] and [4] reveal significant associations between ward head supervision and nurse compliance with SOPs, including fall-prevention protocols and infection control measures. Consistent supervision, reinforced by transformational leadership, enhances adherence to patient safety standards. These findings reaffirm that supervision affects not only individual nurse performance but also the overall quality and safety of patient care [20]. Compliance with safety procedures directly contributes to improved patient experiences, fostering trust, comfort, and satisfaction with nursing services [26].

Variations in supervision models and their effectiveness

Although most studies report positive outcomes of supervision, one study [14] found no significant differences among various clinical supervision models in improving nurse performance. This suggests that the effectiveness of supervision is not solely determined by the model employed, but rather by the quality of implementation, consistency of application, and organizational context. The review also acknowledges several limitations, including the limited number and diversity of articles analyzed, methodological variations across studies, and the predominance of cross-sectional designs, which restrict causal inference. Additionally, contextual factors such as organizational culture and hospital policies may influence the observed outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review of fifteen articles, it can be concluded that ward head supervision and leadership play a pivotal role in improving the overall quality of nursing services within hospital settings. Effective, structured, and continuous supervision has been shown to exert a positive influence on nurse performance, quality of work life, adherence to standard operating procedures (SOPs), and patient safety outcomes. Clinical supervision models, such as the Proctor model have demonstrated their effectiveness in enhancing work adaptation and reducing stress among nurses, particularly during periods of transition or rotation. However, the success of supervision is not determined solely by the model employed; rather, it depends heavily on the quality of implementation, the consistency of supervisory practices, and the degree of organizational support provided. Overall, effective supervision emerges as a key determinant in strengthening service quality, promoting nurse well-being, and ensuring workforce stability.

Recommendations

Hospitals are encouraged to strengthen ward head supervision systems through structured policies, scheduled supervisory activities, and leadership training programs to ensure consistent and effective implementation. Ward heads should adopt supportive supervisory approaches

that incorporate coaching, constructive feedback, and motivational strategies to enhance nurse performance. Staff nurses are encouraged to actively participate in the supervisory process as a means of fostering professional development and reflective practice. Furthermore, supervision should be integrated with broader quality improvement and patient safety initiatives to ensure alignment with institutional goals.

Future research is recommended to examine the relationship between supervision, nurse retention, and turnover using longitudinal designs or mixed-methods approaches. Such studies would provide deeper insights into causal mechanisms and contextual factors influencing supervisory effectiveness, thereby contributing to the development of more robust and sustainable nursing management strategies.

Ethical consideration, competing interest and source of funding

-This systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for secondary research. The review exclusively utilized data derived from previously published studies, and no primary data collection involving human participants was undertaken. As such, this study did not require ethical approval or informed consent, consistent with international guidelines for literature-based research. All included articles were critically appraised and analyzed with respect for academic integrity, ensuring accurate representation of findings, proper attribution of original authors, and avoidance of plagiarism. The selection, screening, and synthesis processes were carried out transparently and systematically, adhering to the PRISMA framework and the PICOT strategy to maintain methodological rigor. The review also upheld principles of confidentiality and responsible scholarship by relying solely on publicly accessible information without manipulating, altering, or misusing any data. All interpretations were grounded in the evidence presented in the original studies, and no attempt was made to distort or overstate the findings. Overall, this review aligns with ethical standards for secondary research, emphasizing integrity, transparency, and respect for the intellectual contributions of prior scholars.

-There is no conflict of interest related to this publication.

-Source of funding is Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

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