

The Determinants of Nurses' Empowerment: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Nurses' empowerment has been widely acknowledged as a vital factor influencing their professional performance, well-being, and retention, as well as the overall quality and safety of healthcare delivery. Encompassing structural, psychological, and professional dimensions, empowerment in nursing is shaped by organizational systems, leadership practices, workplace environments, and broader contextual conditions. Although the literature on nursing empowerment has expanded significantly, the evidence remains fragmented across diverse study designs and healthcare settings. This systematic review synthesized empirical and review-based findings to identify key determinants of nurses' empowerment and to examine its associated outcomes at the professional, organizational, and individual levels. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive search of major academic databases was conducted, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods studies, and systematic reviews focused on nurses or nursing students. A narrative synthesis approach was adopted due to heterogeneity in study designs and measures. The findings revealed that nurses' empowerment is driven by various behavioral, organizational, and contextual factors, including leadership styles, characteristics of the work environment, access to resources, participation in decision-making, and professional autonomy. Empowerment was consistently associated with beneficial outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, motivation, self-efficacy, innovation, and perceived care quality, along with reduced burnout and intention to leave. Overall, nurses' empowerment emerges as a multidimensional and influential construct essential to achieving positive workforce and healthcare system outcomes. Its reinforcement requires strategic, integrated efforts targeting structural frameworks, supportive leadership, and contextual enablers to enhance nurse well-being, workforce sustainability, and quality of care.

1. Introduction

Nurses' empowerment has emerged as a central construct in contemporary healthcare systems due to its strong association with workforce sustainability, quality of care, and organizational effectiveness. Empowerment enables nurses to exercise professional autonomy, participate in decision-making, and access the resources necessary to perform their roles effectively, thereby strengthening both individual

and organizational outcomes. Abdullatif Ibrahim (2023) highlights that empowered nurses demonstrate higher psychological engagement and improved professional functioning, reinforcing the importance of empowerment within hospital environments. Empowerment in nursing is commonly conceptualized through multiple but interrelated dimensions, including structural, psychological, and professional empowerment. Structural empowerment refers to organizational conditions that provide nurses with access to information, support, resources, and opportunities, which are essential for effective practice. Yesilbas and Kantek (2024) demonstrate that structural empowerment is a critical determinant of nurses' job satisfaction, emphasizing its relevance for nurse retention and healthcare system stability. Psychological empowerment, in contrast, reflects nurses' intrinsic motivation, sense of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact within their work roles. Saleh et al. (2022) show that psychological empowerment plays a significant role in enhancing nurses' work motivation and protecting their occupational mental health.

Leadership and management practices represent another foundational determinant of nurses' empowerment. Empowering leadership behaviors foster trust, shared decision-making, and professional growth, which in turn strengthen nurses' engagement and organizational commitment. Al Otaibi et al. (2023) provide empirical evidence that empowering leadership indirectly enhances nurses' work engagement through psychological empowerment, underscoring the mediating role of empowerment processes in leadership-outcome relationships. Similarly, Niinihuhta et al. (2022) demonstrate that transformational leadership is positively associated with structural empowerment and nurses' work-related well-being. The work environment and organizational climate also play a decisive role in shaping empowerment experiences among nurses. Supportive practice environments that promote collaboration, autonomy, and adequate staffing have been shown to enhance nurses' empowerment and professional performance. Taketomi et al. (2024) report that healthier nursing practice environments are significantly associated with higher levels of psychological empowerment among hospital nurses. Furthermore, Al-Ghwary et al. (2024) emphasize that work environment characteristics directly influence nurses' structural empowerment, highlighting the importance of organizational context in empowerment development.

In addition to organizational factors, individual and demographic characteristics influence empowerment levels among nurses. Variations in age, education, professional experience, and cultural context have been shown to affect nurses' access to empowering structures and perceptions of empowerment. Mansour et al. (2022) identify socio-demographic predictors as significant determinants of structural empowerment among newly qualified nurses across different healthcare systems. These findings suggest that empowerment is not uniformly experienced and must be understood within broader contextual and cultural frameworks. Empowerment has also been consistently linked to a range of positive nurse-related and organizational outcomes. Higher levels of empowerment are associated with increased job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, reduced burnout, and improved quality of care. Orlowska and Laguna (2023) demonstrate that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between structural empowerment and both job satisfaction and burnout, reinforcing the multilevel nature of empowerment processes. Moreover, Ding and Wu (2023) show that psychological empowerment reduces turnover intention among nurses by enhancing job satisfaction and lowering emotional exhaustion.

Despite the growing volume of empirical research on nurses' empowerment, the literature remains fragmented across different empowerment dimensions, settings, and methodological approaches. While some reviews have focused on specific outcomes such as job satisfaction or leadership influences, a comprehensive synthesis of the determinants of nurses' empowerment across individual, organizational, and contextual levels remains limited. Teixeira et al. (2023) argue that systematic integration of empowerment research is necessary to guide evidence-based interventions and policy development in nursing practice. Therefore, this systematic review aims to synthesize existing empirical and review evidence on the determinants of nurses' empowerment. By systematically identifying and categorizing the key individual, organizational, leadership, and contextual factors influencing empowerment, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment is shaped in nursing practice. Such evidence is essential for informing nurse managers, policymakers, and healthcare leaders in designing strategies that foster empowered nursing work environments and ultimately enhance healthcare quality and sustainability.

2. Methodology

This systematic review was conducted to identify, synthesize, and critically evaluate existing empirical and review evidence on the determinants of nurses' empowerment. The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility. The flow of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion is presented in Figure 1 (PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram). A comprehensive and systematic literature search was undertaken using major electronic databases relevant to nursing and health sciences research. The search strategy was developed to capture studies that explicitly examined nurses' empowerment and its determinants, including structural, psychological, and professional empowerment, as well as organizational, leadership, and contextual influences. Search terms related to empowerment, nursing practice, leadership, work environment, and professional outcomes were combined using Boolean operators. Only peer-reviewed studies published in English were considered in order to ensure the inclusion of methodologically sound and interpretable evidence.

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they focused on nurses or nursing students and explicitly examined empowerment or one of its recognized dimensions. Eligible studies also needed to investigate determinants, predictors, mediators, or contextual factors influencing empowerment and to employ quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, systematic review, or meta-analytic designs. Studies were excluded if empowerment was not a clearly defined or measured construct, if participants were not nurses or nursing students, or if the publication type was limited to editorials, commentaries, protocols, or conference abstracts without full empirical data. Following the database search, all retrieved records were imported into a reference management system, and duplicate records were removed. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance based on the predefined eligibility criteria. Full-text articles were then assessed to confirm eligibility for inclusion in the review. Any disagreements arising during the screening and selection process were resolved through discussion and consensus. The final set of included studies constituted the evidence base for data extraction and synthesis, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Data extraction was conducted using a structured literature review matrix designed specifically for this review. Extracted data included authorship, year of publication, study design, sample characteristics, empowerment dimensions examined, determinants assessed, and reported outcomes. This information was systematically organized and summarized in Table 1 (Literature Review Matrix) to facilitate comparison and synthesis across studies. The methodological quality of included studies was appraised according to their respective research designs. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses were assessed for clarity of methodology, transparency of reporting, and adherence to established review standards, while observational and cross-sectional studies were evaluated based on sampling strategies, measurement validity, and analytical approaches. Quality appraisal findings were used to inform the interpretation of results rather than to exclude studies solely on quality grounds. Due to heterogeneity in study designs, populations, and outcome measures, a narrative synthesis approach was adopted. Determinants of nurses' empowerment were categorized into individual, organizational, leadership, and contextual domains. Outcomes associated with empowerment were synthesized separately to clarify how empowerment influences nurses' work-related attitudes, well-being, and professional performance. This approach enabled a comprehensive integration of evidence and the identification of consistent patterns and research gaps within the existing literature.

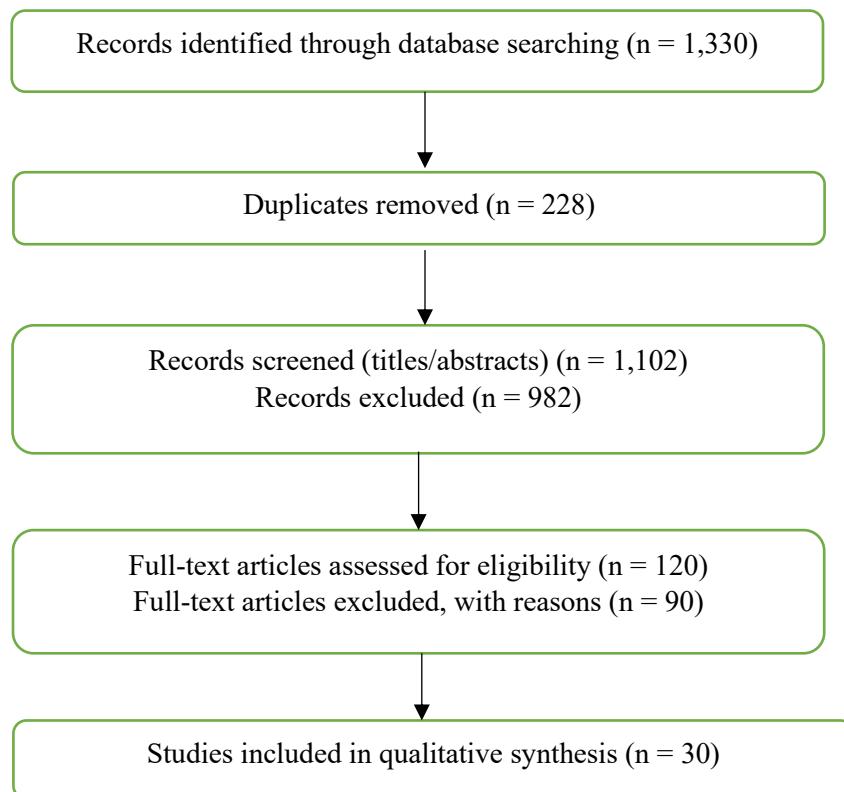


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

3. Results

3.1 Study Selection and Characteristics

The systematic search and screening process resulted in the inclusion of 30 studies that met the predefined eligibility criteria and addressed determinants of nurses' empowerment. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies. The included literature comprised cross-sectional studies, mixed-methods studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and concept analyses, reflecting methodological diversity in empowerment research. The studies were conducted across a wide range of geographical contexts, including Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and multinational settings, highlighting the global relevance of nurses' empowerment. Most primary studies focused on hospital-based nurses, while a smaller number examined nursing students, nurse managers, or nurse leaders. Empowerment was conceptualized using structural, psychological, and professional dimensions, with several studies addressing more than one dimension. Structural empowerment was the most frequently examined construct, followed by psychological empowerment, while professional empowerment appeared less consistently across studies. Leadership and work environment variables were commonly investigated as contextual influences. A detailed overview of study characteristics, empowerment dimensions, determinants, and key outcomes is presented in Table 1 (Literature Review Matrix), which served as the foundation for the synthesis of determinants and outcomes.

Table 1. Literature Review Matrix

No.	Author(s) & Year	Structural Empowerment	Psychological Empowerment	Professional Empowerment	Leadership / Management	Work Environment / Climate	Demographics	Job Satisfaction	Work Motivation	Mental Health / Stress	Work Engagement / Commitment
1	Abdullatif Ibrahim (2023)	✓	✓				✓				
2	Saleh et al. (2022)	✓	✓						✓	✓	
3	Yesilbas & Kantek (2024)	✓						✓			
4	Al Otaibi et al. (2023)		✓		✓						✓
5	Teixeira et al. (2023)			✓	✓	✓					
6	Niinihuhta et al. (2022)	✓			✓					✓	
7	Jeffery et al. (2023)				✓	✓					
8	Wu et al. (2023)	✓				✓			✓		
9	Farghaly Abdelaliem et al. (2025)			✓	✓						

10	Cayaban et al. (2022)	✓	✓				✓				
11	Taketomi et al. (2024)		✓				✓	✓			
12	Orlowska & Laguna (2023)	✓	✓					✓		✓	
13	Al-Ghrary et al. (2024)	✓					✓	✓			
14	Travis & Fitzpatrick (2026)	✓					✓		✓		
15	Lu et al. (2025)			✓	✓	✓					
16	Karukivi et al. (2023)			✓	✓						
17	Dlamini & Park (2024)	✓						✓			
18	Kangasniemi et al. (2024)			✓					✓		
19	Wang et al. (2025)		✓					✓			
20	Yoong et al. (2023)			✓							
21	Mansour et al. (2022)	✓						✓			
22	Albasal et al. (2022)	✓	✓								✓
23	Chang et al. (2025)	✓	✓						✓		
24	Ajanaku et al. (2022)	✓			✓	✓		✓			✓
25	İspir Demir et al. (2023)	✓							✓		
26	Ding & Wu (2023)		✓					✓		✓	
27	Ystaas et al. (2023)	✓			✓	✓		✓			
28	Eskolin et al. (2023)			✓							
29	Eva et al. (2024)					✓		✓		✓	
30	Kruahong et al. (2023)			✓							

3.2 Determinants of Nurses' Empowerment

Analysis of the included studies revealed that nurses' empowerment is shaped by a combination of individual, organizational, leadership, and contextual determinants. Structural empowerment emerged as a central determinant across the literature, emphasizing the importance of access to resources, information, support, and opportunities within healthcare organizations. Abdullatif Ibrahim (2023) demonstrated that structural empowerment significantly predicts nurses' psychological empowerment, highlighting the foundational role of organizational structures in shaping empowerment experiences. Similar findings were reported in diverse healthcare contexts, reinforcing the consistency of this relationship. Leadership and management practices were also identified as critical determinants of nurses' empowerment. Empowering and transformational leadership styles were found to enhance both structural and psychological empowerment by fostering supportive relationships, feedback mechanisms, and participatory decision-making. Al Otaibi et al. (2023) showed that empowering leadership indirectly influences nurses' work engagement through psychological empowerment, underscoring the mediating role of empowerment in leadership-outcome pathways. Evidence from nurse leader populations further

supports the role of leadership in strengthening empowerment and work-related well-being, as demonstrated by Niinihuhta et al. (2022).

The work environment and organizational climate were consistently linked to empowerment levels among nurses. Supportive practice environments characterized by autonomy, collaboration, and adequate organizational support were associated with higher empowerment. Taketomi et al. (2024) reported that healthier nursing practice environments significantly enhance nurses' psychological empowerment, even after controlling for demographic variables. Similarly, Al-Ghwary et al. (2024) found that work environment characteristics directly influence structural empowerment, emphasizing the importance of organizational context in empowerment development. Individual and demographic factors also played a role in shaping empowerment experiences. Age, educational background, professional experience, and cultural context were identified as significant predictors of empowerment in several studies. Mansour et al. (2022) demonstrated that socio-demographic variables such as country, clinical setting, and educational background significantly predict structural empowerment among newly qualified nurses. These findings indicate that empowerment is not uniformly distributed and must be interpreted within broader social and cultural contexts. Professional empowerment emerged as an additional determinant, particularly in studies focusing on professional autonomy, competence, and evidence-based practice. Teixeira et al. (2023) highlighted that professional empowerment is closely linked to organizational and leadership characteristics, reinforcing the interconnected nature of empowerment dimensions. Studies involving interprofessional collaboration and professional autonomy further demonstrated that empowerment is embedded within professional relationships and practice structures.

3.3 Outcomes Associated with Nurses' Empowerment

The included studies consistently reported positive outcomes associated with higher levels of nurses' empowerment. Job satisfaction emerged as one of the most frequently examined outcomes. Yesilbas and Kantek (2024) provided strong meta-analytic evidence demonstrating a significant positive relationship between structural empowerment and job satisfaction among nurses. Similar associations were observed across different cultural and organizational contexts, indicating the robustness of this relationship. Empowerment was also associated with improved work motivation and reduced mental health challenges. Saleh et al. (2022) showed that both structural and psychological empowerment positively predict nurses' work motivation while simultaneously reducing occupational stress. Psychological empowerment, in particular, was found to play a protective role against emotional exhaustion and burnout. Orlowska and Laguna (2023) demonstrated that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between structural empowerment and burnout, highlighting its importance as an underlying mechanism linking organizational conditions to nurse well-being.

Turnover-related outcomes were another key area influenced by empowerment. Ding and Wu (2023) found that psychological empowerment reduces turnover intention among nurses by increasing job satisfaction and decreasing emotional exhaustion. These findings suggest that empowerment not only enhances positive work attitudes but also mitigates adverse workforce outcomes that threaten healthcare system sustainability. Beyond individual outcomes, empowerment was linked to broader organizational and care-related outcomes. Studies examining leadership, work environment, and empowerment reported

associations with improved quality of care, reduced missed nursing care, and enhanced professional performance. Travis and Fitzpatrick (2026) demonstrated that higher structural empowerment is associated with reduced missed nursing care, emphasizing the implications of empowerment for patient safety and care quality. Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of nurses' empowerment for individuals, organizations, and healthcare systems.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interplay of Behavioral, Organizational, and Contextual Determinants

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that nurses' empowerment is not driven by a single factor but rather emerges from the dynamic interaction between behavioral, organizational, and contextual determinants. Organizational structures form the foundational layer of empowerment by shaping nurses' access to information, resources, support, and opportunities. Evidence consistently shows that when healthcare organizations establish empowering structures, nurses are more likely to experience psychological empowerment, manifested through enhanced autonomy, competence, and perceived impact at work. This relationship is strongly supported by empirical findings indicating that structural empowerment is a primary driver of psychological empowerment among nurses (Abdullatif Ibrahim, 2023). Behavioral determinants, particularly leadership behaviors and interpersonal interactions, operate in conjunction with organizational structures to reinforce or weaken empowerment processes. Empowering and transformational leadership styles enhance empowerment by encouraging participation, recognizing contributions, and fostering trust within nursing teams. Leadership behaviors influence how organizational resources are interpreted and utilized by nurses, thereby shaping their empowerment experiences. The mediating role of psychological empowerment in leadership–outcome relationships highlights the importance of behavioral mechanisms in translating structural conditions into positive work-related outcomes (Al Otaibi et al., 2023).

Contextual determinants further shape empowerment by influencing how empowerment initiatives are perceived and enacted within specific cultural, institutional, and professional environments. Work environment characteristics, such as teamwork, collegiality, and organizational climate, interact with leadership and structural conditions to either facilitate or constrain empowerment. Supportive nursing practice environments have been shown to significantly enhance psychological empowerment across diverse healthcare settings (Taketomi et al., 2024). Additionally, socio-cultural factors, including national context, educational background, and clinical setting, contribute to variations in empowerment experiences, underscoring that empowerment is context-sensitive rather than universally uniform (Mansour et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings suggest that nurses' empowerment should be understood as a multilevel phenomenon, where organizational structures provide opportunities, leadership behaviors activate empowerment processes, and contextual factors shape their effectiveness. Isolated interventions targeting only one level are therefore unlikely to achieve sustained empowerment outcomes without alignment across behavioral, organizational, and contextual domains.

4.2 Policy, Practical, and Theoretical Implications

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for healthcare systems and regulatory bodies to prioritize empowerment as a core component of workforce sustainability and quality care delivery. Policies that mandate supportive work environments, leadership development, and participatory governance structures can create systemic conditions conducive to empowerment. Evidence demonstrating the link between empowerment and reduced turnover, improved job satisfaction, and enhanced care quality reinforces the strategic importance of embedding empowerment within national and institutional nursing policies (Ding & Wu, 2023). Practical implications are particularly relevant for nursing managers and healthcare leaders. The consistent association between empowerment and positive nurse outcomes suggests that managerial practices should focus on strengthening structural empowerment through access to resources, information transparency, and shared decision-making.

Leadership training programs that emphasize empowering and transformational leadership behaviors are essential for translating organizational policies into meaningful empowerment experiences at the unit level. Interventions aimed at improving the nursing work environment, including teamwork and collegial support, can further enhance empowerment and its downstream effects on motivation, engagement, and care quality (Niinihuhta et al., 2022). Theoretically, this review contributes to the empowerment literature by reinforcing the multidimensional nature of empowerment and clarifying the mechanisms through which it influences nurse outcomes. The findings support empowerment theory by demonstrating that psychological empowerment frequently mediates the relationship between structural conditions and individual outcomes such as job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover intention. This multilevel evidence extends existing theoretical models by integrating organizational, behavioral, and contextual dimensions into a more comprehensive understanding of nurses' empowerment (Orlowska & Laguna, 2023).

4.3 Comparison with Existing Reviews, Limitations, and Future Research

The findings of this review are largely consistent with previous systematic and meta-analytic reviews that report positive associations between empowerment and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and professional performance among nurses. Meta-analytic evidence confirming the strong relationship between structural empowerment and job satisfaction aligns closely with the current synthesis (Yesilbas & Kantek, 2024). Similarly, umbrella and structured reviews emphasize the central role of empowerment in improving nurse retention and work outcomes across diverse healthcare systems (Chang et al., 2025). However, this review extends existing literature by integrating a broader range of determinants and outcomes, including leadership behaviors, work environment characteristics, and contextual influences, rather than focusing solely on single empowerment dimensions. By synthesizing evidence across individual, organizational, and contextual levels, this review provides a more holistic understanding of empowerment processes in nursing.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the majority of included studies employed cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to infer causal relationships between empowerment determinants and outcomes. Second, variations in empowerment measurement tools and conceptual definitions may have introduced heterogeneity across studies. Third, although the review included studies from diverse

regions, certain geographical areas remain underrepresented, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and intervention-based studies to better establish causal pathways and assess the long-term impact of empowerment initiatives. There is also a need for greater conceptual clarity and consistency in measuring empowerment, particularly across cultural contexts. Expanding research to include underrepresented regions and diverse healthcare settings will further enhance the global applicability of empowerment theory and practice. Additionally, future studies should explore how emerging challenges in healthcare systems influence empowerment dynamics among nurses.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review set out to synthesize and critically examine the determinants and outcomes of nurses' empowerment across diverse healthcare settings. The findings confirm that nurses' empowerment is a multifaceted and dynamic construct shaped by the interaction of organizational structures, leadership behaviors, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors. Empowerment is not an isolated attribute of individual nurses but rather a product of supportive systems that enable access to resources, information, participation in decision-making, and professional autonomy. The review demonstrates that when nurses experience higher levels of empowerment, they report more favorable professional and organizational outcomes, including enhanced job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, improved work motivation, reduced burnout and turnover intention, and better perceived quality of care. These outcomes highlight empowerment as a critical mechanism for sustaining the nursing workforce and promoting excellence in healthcare delivery, particularly in increasingly complex and demanding clinical environments.

Importantly, the findings underscore that empowerment initiatives are most effective when implemented holistically. Structural empowerment provides the necessary foundation, while leadership practices and positive work environments activate and sustain psychological empowerment. Contextual considerations, such as cultural and institutional differences, further influence how empowerment is experienced and translated into outcomes, reinforcing the need for tailored and context-sensitive approaches. Overall, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of nurses' empowerment by integrating evidence across multiple levels and outcomes. It emphasizes the strategic importance of empowerment for healthcare organizations seeking to enhance nurse well-being, workforce stability, and care quality. Future efforts to strengthen nursing practice and healthcare system performance should therefore prioritize empowerment as a central organizational and professional objective.

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