

*Original Research*

# Examining the Effect of Servant Leadership on Organisational Trust and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of servant leadership on organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour. The population of the study consists of nurses who were employed in three private hospitals owned by a health group in Ankara, Turkey. A survey was applied to 266 nurses through face-to-face interview method, and the data were analysed using various statistical analyses. The results of the analyses showed that servant leadership accounted for 40.8% of the total variance in organisational trust, and the rise in nurses' perceptions of servant leadership statistically improved their perceptions of organisational trust. Also, servant leadership was found to account for 34.6% of the total variance in organisational citizenship behaviour, and the rise in nurses' perceptions of servant leadership statistically improved their perceptions of organisational citizenship behaviours. In conclusion, it appears that it is highly essential for leaders to adopt a servant leadership approach towards their employees in order to increase trust and citizenship behaviour in their organisations.

**Keywords:** Nurse, organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational trust, servant leadership.

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## Introduction

Leadership is one of the concepts that have major effects on healthcare institutions and holds a key role in all organisations, including medical facilities (Raoush, 2022). Leaders should adopt positive behavioural styles towards their employees to allow nurses to render more efficient, effective, and quality services and to meet the expectations of their patients in the best way possible in working environments with complex organisational structures such as health institutions (Özer et al., 2019). Here, the servant leadership approach (Greenleaf, 1977), which places the needs, aspirations, and interests of other people above their own, comes to the fore as an effective type of leadership in healthcare organisations. Servant leadership is regarded as a model that fosters the professional development of nurses in healthcare institutions and also enhances the quality of healthcare services through a combination of interdisciplinary teamwork, shared vision, shared decision-making, and ethical behaviour (Hall, 2015).

Servant leadership is defined as a type of empathetic leadership, i.e., a leadership that is capable of placing oneself in other people's shoes, listening to their problems, and finding solutions (Bakan & Doğan, 2012). According to Sims (1997), servant leadership is a type of leadership that respects the dignity and values of people who are influenced by leaders and allows the creative abilities of these people to flourish (Sims, 1997). According to Buchen (1998), a servant leader is a person who focuses on developing a bond of trust with individuals other than himself/herself, pays attention to the future of individuals, and takes initiative in respect thereof (Buchen, 1998). Spears (2004) states that servant leadership adopts the following ten characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, responsibility for people's development, and community building (Spears, 2004). Patterson (2003) states that servant leadership consists of seven characteristics: agapao (moral) love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson, 2003).

The concept of organisational trust, discussed here, is defined as reliance on or support towards the employer and colleagues (Gilbert & Tang, 1998). In other words, organisational trust refers to either the reliance of employees on their closest superiors or intra-organisational trust, described as the trust between employees and those who run the organisation, business units, or team members. Organisational trust, in other words, relates to interpersonal trust within work groups or teams (Abun et al., 2022). Trust is a vital facet of interpersonal interactions within the organisations, particularly those between employees and managers. As a fundamental component of professional life, trust is important not only among employees but also in maintaining the integrity of organisations (Demircan & Ceylan, 2003). In an individual or organisational context, trust enjoys a power that facilitates the work, strengthens interpersonal communication and brings out the spirit of solidarity. It is very important that managers and leaders build an environment of trust in both individual and organisational contexts for the development of their organisations (Thames & Webster, 2009; Aydın, 2019).

Finally, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is defined as a voluntary, "extra role" behaviour that is neither formally rewarded nor punished by the organisation, but collectively contributes to the organisation by boosting productivity and/or effectiveness

(Organ, 1988). Another definition states that OCB is “a voluntary behaviour that is not part of an employee’s official job requirement but still promotes the effective functioning of the organisation” (Appelbaum et al., 2004). According to Organ (1988), OCB consists of five dimensions: conscientiousness, altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship and civic virtue. Accordingly, *altruism* refers to behaviours with the eagerness to help others perform a task or solve a problem in an organisational context (Podsakoff et al., 1990). *Courtesy* is defined as a set of courteous and considerate behaviours towards others and consists of voluntary attitudes that seek to minimise work-related problems (Tabassum, 2016). *Conscientiousness* is related to employees’ willingness to give more than what is expected of them in the organisation and exhibiting behaviours according to minimum standards (Erdem, 2003). *Sportsmanship* refers to the willingness to tolerate the inevitable drawbacks and impositions imposed by the job without complaining rather than wasting time by complaining about trivial matters (Podsakoff et al., 2000; Somech & Ron, 2007). *Civic virtue* represents an interest in or commitment to the organisation on a macro level as a whole. This behaviour includes the desire to actively engage in management, monitor the environment for threats and opportunities, and to pursue one’s interests even at a considerable personal cost (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of servant leadership on organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour. In the literature, studies have been conducted on various samples in relation to these three variables. However, it is noteworthy that no studies have examined the effects of servant leadership on organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour together in a sample of nurses. Therefore, this study is considered to contribute significantly to the literature.

## Methods

### *Sampling*

The population of the study consisted of nurses who were working in three private hospitals owned by a health group in Ankara (N=508). The sufficient sample size for the study was calculated with the “formula for sample calculation in groups with finite population” (Özdamar, 2003) and the required sample size was determined as 219 people. Since an increased number of nurses would positively affect representation, a total of 266 nurses were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

### *Data Collection*

The data were collected face-to-face between 1 November and 15 December 2022. The “Servant Leadership Scale”, which was developed by Liden et al., (2015) and whose Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Kılıç and Aydın (2016), was used to assess the participants’ perceptions of servant leadership. The scale consists of one dimension and 7 items. The level of agreement with the items on the scale is rated with anchors from “Strongly Disagree=1” to “Strongly Agree=5”. The higher the score, the higher the perception of servant leadership on the scale. The Cronbach’s alpha value for the scale was found to be 0.90 in this study.

The “Organisational Trust Scale”, a 4-item, unidimensional scale developed by Tyler and Bies (1990) and adapted into Turkish by Polat (2009) was used to assess participants’ perceptions of organisational trust. The scale is rated on a 5-point Likert type (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). The Cronbach’s alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.88 in this study.

The “Organisational Citizenship Behaviour Questionnaire” was developed based on the studies of Vey and Campbell (2004) and Williams and Shiaw (1999) and adapted into Turkish by Basim and Şeşen (2006). The scale consists of a total of 5 subscales and 19 items: altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, civic virtue, and sportsmanship. The level of agreement with the items on the scale is rated from “Strongly Disagree=1” to “Strongly Agree=5”. The Cronbach’s alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.92 in this study.

### *Data Analysis*

IBM SPSS 22.0 software was used to conduct all analyses in the study. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods (percentage, mean, etc.) Correlation analysis, simple regression analysis and reliability analysis were carried out.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Health Sciences, Necmettin Erbakan University granted ethical approval (Date: 06/07/2022, Decision Number: 2022/251). The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and the collected data would be used only for scientific purposes.

## **Results**

When the descriptive characteristics of the participants were analysed in Table 1, it was observed that 56.8% of the nurses were 25 years old or younger, 81.2% of them were female, 64.7% of them were single, and 57.9% of them graduated from high school. While 41% of the participants were working in the healthcare sector for 7 years or more, 39.5% were working in their present unit for 2–5 years. A total of 42.5% of the nurses were working in inpatient service, 5.3% in outpatient service, 9.4% in emergency service, 29.3% in intensive care unit, and 13.5% in other units (operating theatre or chief physician’s office).

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of participants

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Age (year)</i></b>		
≤ 25	151	56.8
≥ 26	115	43.2
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
Female	216	81.2
Male	50	18.8
<b><i>Marital status</i></b>		

Married	94	35.3
Single	172	64.7
<b><i>Educational level</i></b>		
High school	154	57.9
Associate	70	26.3
Undergraduate and above	42	15.8
<b><i>Total working time in the healthcare sector (year)</i></b>		
≤ 2	76	28.6
3-6	81	30.4
≥ 7	109	41.0
<b><i>Total working time in the present unit (year)</i></b>		
≤ 1	94	35.3
2-5	105	39.5
≥ 6	67	25.2
<b><i>Unit of work</i></b>		
Inpatient service	113	42.5
Outpatient service	14	5.3
Emergency service	25	9.4
Intensive care unit	78	29.3
Other	36	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics related to the responses of the nurses on servant leadership, organisational trust, and organisational citizenship behaviour questionnaires. Accordingly, the mean score of the participant in the servant leadership scale was 4.47; their mean score of the organisational trust scale was 4.03; and their mean score of the organisational citizenship behaviour questionnaire was 4.55. Since the assessments of the nurses related to servant leadership, organisational trust, and organisational citizenship behaviour were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, the higher the mean score approached “5”, the higher the level of the related subscale. Accordingly, it can be asserted that the participants’ perceptions of servant leadership, organisational trust, and organisational citizenship behaviour were high.

Table 2 shows the results of the Pearson’s correlation analysis done to examine the correlation between the variables. Accordingly, a significant, positive, and moderate correlation was found between servant leadership and organisational trust ( $r=.639$ ;  $p<0.01$ ); a positive and moderate correlation between servant leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour ( $r=.588$ ;  $p<0.01$ ); and a significant, positive, and moderate correlation between organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour ( $r=.551$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation values of research variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Servant Leadership	Organisational Trust	Organisational Citizenship Behavior
Servant Leadership	4.47	0.56	1		
Organisational Trust	4.03	0.87	.639*	1	
Organisational Citizenship Behavior	4.55	0.45	.588*	.551*	1

\* $p < 0.01$ , SD: Standard deviation

A simple regression analysis was done in order to examine the correlations between the variables in the study, and two different regression models were constructed. Statistical estimates of the regression model constructed to examine the effect of servant leadership on organisational trust showed that the model was significant ( $F=181.998$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The results of the regression analysis showed that servant leadership perception accounted for 40.8% of the total variance in organisational trust. When t-test results for the significance of the regression coefficient in the regression model were analysed, nurses' perception of servant leadership improved their perception of organisational trust statistically ( $\beta=.639$ ;  $t=13.491$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The results of the regression analysis on the effect of servant leadership perception on organisational citizenship behaviour showed that servant leadership accounted for 34.6% of the total variance in organisational citizenship behaviour. The analysis results showed that the nurses' perception of servant leadership increased their organisational citizenship behaviours statistically ( $\beta=.588$   $t=11.806$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 3).

Table 3. Regression analysis results on the effect of servant leadership on organisational trust and organisational citizenship behavior

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p
Organisational Trust	(Constant)	-.410	.332		-1.236	.218
	Servant Leadership	.994	.074	.639	13.491	<0.001
	R =.639      R <sup>2</sup> =.408      F =181.998      p<0.001					
Organisational Citizenship Behavior	(Constant)	2.417	.182		13.276	<0.001
	Servant Leadership	.477	.040	.588	11.806	<0.001
	R =.588      R <sup>2</sup> =.346      F =139.388      p<0.001					

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effect of servant leadership on organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour. The mean score on the servant leadership perceptions of the nurses who participated in the study was 4.47 and accordingly, the nurses' perceptions of servant leadership were high. Ma et al. (2022) also found that the participants' perceptions of servant leadership were high in their study on nurses. In their studies, Uğurluoğlu et al. (2015), Özer (2019), Yüksel et al. (2021), Park et al. (2015), and Yeter (2019) found that the participants' perceptions of servant leadership were above average. Servant leadership reflects a style that pays attention to the needs of others, promotes personal development, and cares more about others than oneself. Since servant leadership produces positive effects on employees, its high level of perception by employees is considered as a desirable outcome in organisations.

The study revealed that the participants' perception of organisational trust was high (4.03). The studies by Özer et al. (2021) and Atalla and Abdelaal (2019) on nurses also found that the participants' perceptions of organisational trust were high. A study conducted by Halıcı et al., (2015) reported that healthcare professionals exhibited a high level of trust. Building an environment of trust is an essential issue for hospitals. Nurses should trust their colleagues, managers, and organisations in order to deliver effective and productive nursing care to patients (Aly & El-Shanawany, 2016). This study shows that nurses' perceptions of organisational trust are high, indicating that there is a favourable condition for trust in the three hospitals where the study was conducted.

In the study, it was also found that the mean scores of the participant in the organisational citizenship behaviour questionnaire were high. In their study, Öztürk and Özata (2013), Geckil and Tikici (2016), and Nal et al. (2021) also found that the participants had a high level of organisational citizenship behaviour. Since OCB refers to the voluntary behaviours that employees exhibit depending on their own request without any expectation, a high level of this behaviour is considered to be a desirable situation for organisations.

This study revealed that the perception of servant leadership accounted for 40.8% of the total variance in organisational trust, and the rise in the perception of servant leadership statistically improved the perception of organisational trust. In their study on healthcare professionals, Uğurluoğlu et al., (2015) found that servant leadership accounted for 39.7% of organisational trust and servant leadership had a positive and statistically significant effect on the level of organisational trust. A study conducted by Kurnaz (2018) also reported a significant and positive correlation between servant leadership and organisational trust and showed that all subscales of servant leadership accounted for 42.5% of total variance of organisational trust. The study conducted by Yeter (2019) on healthcare professionals demonstrated that servant leadership perception positively affected organisational trust, and servant leadership perception accounted for 66.5% of the change in organisational trust. Nadi and Ghahremani (2011) also found significant correlations between servant leadership and organisational trust in their study on nurses (247). Similar results on the positive effect of servant leadership on organisational trust were found in studies by Rezaei et al. (2012), Joseph and Winston (2005), Dong-Joo (2008), Karatepe et al. (2019), Hanif et al. (2020), Almutairi et al.

(2020) and Kurniawan et al. (2020). Servant leadership affects trust not only between leaders and followers but also among followers, thus contributing to formation of mutual trust and solidarity in organisations. Therefore, servant leadership is considered as a significant variable in developing and sustaining organisational trust (Joseph & Winston, 2005).

This study revealed that servant leadership perception accounted for 34.6% of the total variance in organisational citizenship behaviour and a rise in servant leadership perception statistically improved organisational citizenship behaviour. A study conducted by Viseshoochatkul and Nonthanathorn (2020) on nurses reported that servant leadership had a significant effect on organisational citizenship behaviour and servant leadership accounted for 24.1% of the total variance in organisational citizenship behaviour. The study of Srimulyani and Hermanto (2022) also reported that servant leadership had a positive effect on nurses' organisational citizenship behaviours. A study conducted by Shoukat et al., (2019) on healthcare professionals also reported a positive and significant correlation between servant leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour and determined that servant leadership strongly affected organisational citizenship. Also, a study conducted by Djalil and Idris (2022) on healthcare professionals revealed that servant leadership affected organisational citizenship behaviour, and the higher the level of servant leadership, the higher the level of organisational citizenship behaviour. The study by Reed (2015) also indicated a positive correlation between servant leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour. Similar results on the significant effect of servant leadership on organisational citizenship behaviour were achieved in studies conducted by Baytok and Doğanay Ergen (2013), Mathur and Negi (2014), Abid et al. (2015), Aziz et al. (2018), Amir (2019), and Ghalavi and Nastiezaie (2020). These results suggest that the adoption of a servant leadership approach would make employees more enthusiastic to perform extra roles (Aziz et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

The results of the present study revealed that nurses' perceptions of servant leadership, organisational trust, and organisational citizenship behaviour were high. Moreover, as nurses' perceptions of servant leadership improved, their perceptions of organisational trust and organisational citizenship behaviour also enhanced. Here, it is very important for servant leaders to enhance the working environment and conditions, to act with modesty, to keep communication channels open continuously, and to listen carefully to their employees in order to increase trust and citizenship behaviours in their organisations. Therefore, it is recommended that training programmes (such as courses, seminars, etc.) be organised in order to develop servant leadership characteristics in leaders such as empathy, listening, empowerment, and visioning and to raise awareness about servant leadership in healthcare institutions.

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