

Knowledge and Practice of Nursing Students on Health Care Ethics

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Abstract: The nursing students are responsible for gaining knowledge about health care ethics and all nursing institutions or colleges either in worldwide or in Malaysia made ethics, moral and laws are included in their education system. The aim of the study is to assess the knowledge and practices of nursing students in health care ethics at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Kuantan. A cross-sectional study was conducted using a self-administered structured questionnaire to assess the nursing students' knowledge in basic health ethics concepts with 15 multiple choice questions. Good knowledge was measured by a score $\geq 50\%$ in the knowledge assessment test. Regarding on the practice of nursing students in health care ethics was assessed with 8 questions and scored using a Likert scale. The findings of this study revealed that out of 128 nursing students, overall, 91 (71.1%) scored $\geq 50\%$ in the healthcare ethics knowledge test and 116 (90.6%) nursing students are exhibited in a good level of practice in health care ethics. There was an association between gender and level of knowledge ($p=0.005$) and between their CGPA and level of knowledge ($p=0.001$) while there was no association between all demographic characteristics and level of practice and there was no association between level of knowledge and level of practice ($p>0.005$). Mostly, the nursing students at Faculty of nursing, IIUM are exhibited good knowledge and practice in health care ethics. Therefore, it is recommended that it is needed to maintain and improve the structured teaching learning methods for nursing students regarding health care ethics to address basic concepts in nursing ethics and its application in clinical practice.

Keywords: Nursing student, Knowledge, Practice, healthcare ethics

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there has been growing public concern regarding the ethical conduct of healthcare professionals. This is often reflected as complaints about poor ethical conduct and an increasing use of litigation against health care practitioners including nurses [13]. These matters have also included ethical issues that faced by nurses such as obtaining informed consent, patient's confidentiality, autonomy and end of life issues[6]. Many issues regarding unethical behavior or poor ethical conduct arises because lack of education about health care ethics. Education about health care ethics is provided since undergraduate study. All nursing institutions or colleges either in worldwide made ethics, morality and laws are included in their education system as it is very valuable to become one of professional nurses. In Malaysia, ethics education is included as part of the programme for undergraduate study. Knowledge and skills are two main elements in ensuring providing good and effective quality of care to the patients. Vanlaere & Gastmans emphasizes that to

improving the quality of life and care of the patient, nurses should take consideration and learn the virtuous disposition of care and attitude from the ethical perspective alongside with essential integrity [14].

Education about ethics provide nurses as well as student nurses with tools to reflect critically on their care practice and the application of codes of ethics can also help during their clinical practices. Today, nursing ethics in education has immense competition with an already content filled nursing program regulated by state and national accrediting bodies [1]. It is the role of the nurse educator to select strategies to creatively integrate nursing ethics into the curriculum. Besides that, student nurses also sometimes got complaints from the patients as well as from staff nurses or ward manager regarding their attitudes, moral values and ethics in taking care of the patients [12]. Many nursing students are feeling unconcerned regarding the ethical issues that happened because they think it is only occurring among registered staff nurse. Besides, some

nursing students also are not aware in detail why they need to learn about ethics and laws in nursing course [2].

It is important for nursing students that they must have knowledge regarding health care ethics which is it practically apply their critical thinking skills when providing care to the patient [11]. Yet, nursing graduates with less experience are not consistently have knowledge about ethic and lack of critical thinking skills. This lacking is due to their nursing curriculum focusing on the accumulation of knowledge rather than the application of knowledge to real situation [12]. Based on extensive literature review, there is no studies had been conducted to show the level of knowledge and practice among nursing students in Malaysia about health care ethics. Therefore, this study will assess the knowledge and practices of nursing students in health care ethics at IIUM in Kuantan, Pahang.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A cross sectional study was conducted among 128 nursing students at IIUM Kuantan, between February to April 2017. Purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents from all years of nursing students at the Faculty of Nursing who had experienced in a clinical setting. A self-administered questionnaire was used as a research tool and got permission from the author with reliability Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.764. A pilot study was conducted among 30 selected nursing students in early 2017. The questionnaire included three parts such as demographic background, knowledge and practice of healthcare ethics. The socio-demographic variables were age, gender, level of study,

cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and duration of clinical experience. Regarding knowledge about health care ethics included 15 multiple choice questions and the participants need to choose correct answer to the questions given. They were asked about the basis of ethical principles and give one mark for correct answers and Zero mark for a wrong answer. And then regarded as good knowledge if total mark with $\geq 50\%$. In the practical part, a total of 8 questions was included and the scoring using 5-point Likert rating scale. The questions asked included the issues of practical ethics, patient’s autonomy, confidentiality and a patient’s right. The scores were 5=strongly agreed, 4=agreed, 3=not sure, 2=disagreed, and 1=strongly disagreed. Data was analyzed by using (SPSS) version 20 with descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics. The ethical approval was taken from Kulliyah of nursing postgraduate research committee (KNPGRC), IIUM research and ethic committee (IREC) and nursing students from faculty of nursing at IIUM.

RESULTS

128 nursing students from year two, three and four at IIUM Kuantan were involved and most of the students 106 (82.8%) were female and 22 (17.2%) were male. More than half of the participants 98 (76.6%) were aged more than 23 years old. The others, 30 (23.4%), were aged between 20 and 22. 87 (68%) of the students were from year two and year three while 41 (32%) were year four. There were 40 (31.2%) of the students had CGPA between 2.1 – 3.0 whereas 88 (68.8%) had CGPA between 3.1–4.0. More than half of the students 98(76.6%) were had clinical experience more than 26 weeks and 30 (23.4%) were less than 26 weeks. It was shown in Table 1.

Table-1: Socio-demographic data characteristics of nursing students at IIUM Kuantan

N=191	Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	17.2
	Female	106	82.8
Age	20 – 22	30	23.4
	≥ 23	98	76.6
Level of study	Year 2 & 3	87	68.0
	Year 4	41	32.0
CGPA	2.1 – 3.0	40	31.2
	3.1 – 4.0	88	68.8
	≤ 26	30	23.4
	≥ 26	98	76.6

91 students (71.1%) from whole populations have good knowledge in healthcare ethics while 37

students (28.9%) have poor knowledge towards health care ethics. It showed in Table 2.

Table-2: Level of knowledge in healthcare ethics among nursing students (n=128)

Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)		
Level of knowledge	Good ($\geq 50\%$)	91	71.1
	Poor ($\leq 50\%$)	37	28.9

The majority of the students has good practice with 90.6% (n=116) while only 9.4% (n=12) have poor

practice towards health care ethics. It showed in Table 3.

Table-3: Level of practice of nursing students in healthcare ethics (n=128)

Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)		
Level of practice	Good	116	90.6
	Poor	12	9.4

Each question from the practice questions were analyzed and recorded in table 4.

Table-4: Practice of nursing students on healthcare ethics

Questions	Strongly/ Dis agree (n (%))	Not sure (n (%))	Strongly/ Agree (n (%))
Ethical conduct is only important to avoid legal action	43 (33.6)	22 (17.2)	63 (49.2)
Patient's wishes must always be adhered to	23 (18.0)	23 (18.0)	82 (64.0)
Patient should be always be told if something is wrong	4 (3.1)	11 (8.6)	115 (88.3)
Confidential cannot be kept in modern care and should be abandoned	94 (73.4)	21 (16.4)	13 (10.2)
Consent only for operations – not for tests and medications	85 (66.5)	18 (14.0)	25 (19.5)
Close relatives must always be told about patient's condition	14 (11.0)	16 (12.5)	98 (76.5)
Children (except in an emergency) should never be treated without consent of parent or guardians	38 (29.7)	12 (9.4)	78 (60.9)
Doctors & nurses should refuse to treat a violent patient	97 (75.8)	18 (14.0)	13 (10.2)

According to table 4, 49.2% of the students concluded that ethical conduct is only important to avoid legal action. 64.0% of the students were having a good practice towards the question about patient's rights, which of them concluded that the patient's wishes must always be adhered to and 88.3% of the students also agreed with the patient should be always be told if something is wrong. 73.4% were chosen strongly disagreed with confidential cannot be kept in modern care and should be abandoned. 66.5% of the students concluded that they strongly disagreed with the consent only for operations – not for tests and medications whilst 76.5% of the students were strongly agreed to 'close relatives must always be told about the patient's condition'. For question 'children (except in an emergency) should never be treated without consent of parent or guardians', 60.9% of them agreed with the statement although, about 29.7% of the students disagreed. There were 75.8% of the students concluded

that they disagreed with doctors & nurses should refuse to treat a violent patient followed by 14.0% students chosen not sure and 10.2% agreed with the question.

Association between socio-demographic characteristics and level of knowledge of nursing students in healthcare ethics

There was a significant association between gender and level of knowledge as the p-value is less than 0.05 which is 0.005. Meanwhile, there was no association between the age and level of knowledge with the p-value is 0.346. In addition, there was no association between level (year) of study and the level of knowledge with p-value is 0.079. Moreover, there was associated between CGPA and level of knowledge as p-value is 0.001. There was no association between duration of the clinical experience and level of knowledge with p-value= 0.346 equivalent with age. It was shown in Table 5.

Table-5: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and level of knowledge of nursing students in healthcare ethics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Level of Knowledge		χ^2 statistics (df)	p-values
	Poor knowledge N (%)	Good knowledge N (%)		
Gender	12 (54.5)	10 (45.5)	8.498 (1)	0.005*
Male	25 (23.6)	81 (76.4)		
Age	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	0.374 (1)	0.346*
20 - 22	27 (27.6)	71 (72.4)		
Level of study	29 (33.3)	58 (66.7)	2.590 (1)	0.079*
Year 2 &3	8 (19.5)	33 (80.5)		
CGPA	21 (52.5)	19 (47.5)	15.760 (1)	0.001*
2.1 – 3.0	16 (18.2)	72 (81.8)		
Duration of clinical experience (weeks)	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	0.374 (1)	0.346*
≤ 26	19 (33.3)	38 (66.7)		
≥ 26				

* p value < 0.05

Association between socio demographic characteristics and level of practice of nursing students in healthcare ethics

There was no significant association between gender and practice (p=0.661). Besides, there was no association between age and year of study with the level

of practice with p-value were 0.176 and 0.056 respectively. In addition, there was no association between CGPA and level of practice as (p= 0.449). There was no association between duration of the clinical experience and level of practice (p = 0.176). It was shown in Table 6.

Table-6: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and level of practice of nursing students in healthcare ethics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Level of Practice		χ^2 statistics (df)	p-values
	Poor practice N (%)	Good practice N (%)		
Gender	2 (9.1)	20 (90.9)	0.003 (1)	0.661*
Male	10 (9.4)	96 (90.6)		
Age	1 (3.3)	29 (96.7)	1.683 (1)	0.176*
20 - 22	11 (11.2)	87 (88.8)		
Level of study	11 (12.6)	76 (87.4)	3.416 (1)	0.056*
Year 2 &3	1 (2.4)	40 (97.6)		
CGPA	3 (7.5)	37 (92.5)	0.241 (1)	0.449*
2.1 – 3.0	9 (10.2)	79 (89.8)		
Duration of clinical experience (weeks)	1 (3.3)	29 (96.7)	1.683 (1)	0.176*
≤ 26	11 (11.2)	87 (88.8)		
≥ 26				

* p value <0.05

Association between level of knowledge and level of practice of nursing students in healthcare ethics

Based on table 7, there was no association between level of knowledge and level of practice of health care ethics (p=0.476).

Table-7: Association between level of knowledge and level of practice of nursing students in healthcare ethics

Knowledge	Practice		χ^2 statistics (df)	p-value
	Poor N (%)	Good N (%)		
Poor ($\leq 50\%$)	4 (10.8)	33 (89.2)	0.126 (1)	0.476*
Good ($\geq 50\%$)	8 (8.8)	83 (91.2)		

Chi square test *p-value <0.05

DISCUSSION

In general, the overall results revealed that most of the respondents had a good level of knowledge regarding ethics. The findings of this study disagreed with various studies that have been carried out in an outside country on the knowledge levels of ethics. Based from the study done by Osingada *et al.*, only 15% of the 114 respondents scored $\geq 50\%$ in the ethics knowledge test and the rest were having scored $\leq 50\%$, which indicated that most of them were having low knowledge regarding nursing ethics [10].

These results implied that there are good and adequate sources of learning in International Islamic University Malaysia, (IIUM) Kuantan campus to get the knowledge regarding health care ethics. Therefore, most of the nursing students had good knowledge in healthcare ethics. This finding was similar to the findings of the previous study done by Solum *et al.* that showed the minority of the students had poor knowledge because of having less knowledge about the basic concepts of ethics that are relevant to nursing care such as informed consent, confidentiality, veracity, and principles of ethics [13].

In addition, most of the students having a good practice towards health care ethics. Most of the respondents from previous study done by Hariharan *et al.* were aware of the common ethical issues and it is same with the result of this study [4].

These results imply that good practice level for both studies due to excellent applied of knowledge regarding ethics towards real clinical settings and it has the same opinion with Vanlaere, Timmermann, Stevens & Gastmans. They pointed out about clinical supervisors taught the student nurses to analyze, interpret and evaluate their internship experience and the knowledge gained through that experience and helps them to attain the level of self-awareness and have good nursing practice [15].

There was an association between gender and level of knowledge as the p value is 0.005. This result had the same result with a previous study that carried out by Jayanthi, Balakrishnan, Ching, Latif & Nasirudeen [5]. The study was about the factors influencing the academic performance of students. It has shown that female students performing better academically than males and proposed that females have better study skills than their male counterparts.

They believed that female students perform academically better than males because they work harder and attend class more frequently.

Besides that, this finding was contrasted with the study conducted by Osingada *et al.* [10]. In a previous study, there was no an association between gender and level of knowledge. This might because in this study was conducted among staff nurses in three hospitals at Uganda and not influenced by their sexual characteristics.

There has no an association between the age and level of knowledge as the p-value is more than 0.05. This results had similar to the study conducted by Marta Losa Iglesias *et al.* That showed there was remarkable differences were found between nurses of different ages and how they obtained their knowledge [8]. They were found that young and old nurses reported having statistically different amounts of ethical and legal knowledge. These results proved that increased with age do not affect their level of knowledge.

Moreover, there is also no association between level (year) of study and level of knowledge. This finding has difference result with various previous studies. A study by Osingada *et al.* revealed that those had attained a diploma or higher academic qualification were more likely to score above the knowledge test pass mark of 50% when compared with nurses that had a certificate-level training [10]. This quite different with this study because many students from year 2, 3 and 4 were having a good level of knowledge. The distinction of this result might be because of different methods of approach and target populations, which in previous studies were among staff nurses while in this study is just undergraduate students.

Marta Losa Iglesias *et al.* claimed that education of ethics in nursing has become increasingly important year by year as it was an important part of early nursing education. It can be proven by the level of study, the higher the level of study, the more exposure towards important of learning ethics in nursing education [8]. Even though, the majority of the students from year 2, 3 and 4 has a high percentage of good level of knowledge, however, in this study the higher the level of study did not have an effect on the performance of a knowledge test.

In contrast, there is association between CGPA and level of knowledge. This finding showed that those had a higher-grade point average had better on the academic performance than those had lower grade point average. This might due to having more self-competency and gain more knowledge when had better grade point average. Thus, this association was found because of the knowledge that was acquired through their university-level nursing degree.

In addition, there is no association between duration of clinical experience and the level of knowledge. According to the result, most students from year 2; year 3 and year 4 were having a good score in knowledge. It showed that the longer or more duration in clinical experience, the more people have better knowledge regarding ethics as they can relate what they have learned through theory with clinical situation. However, this result had similar with previous studies by Hariharan *et al.* which duration in practice was not associated with the knowledge in nursing ethics [4]. This result had same viewed with Gallagher's views that ethical competence has not only emerged during the development of general professional competence, but rather requires specific ethics education [3].

Meanwhile, there is no association between age, level of study, CGPA and duration of clinical with the level of practice in ethics. These three socio demographic characteristics showed the p value more than 0.05. These findings are paralleled with Osingada *et al.* Study that stated there was no association between age, gender and duration of practice with the level of practice [10]. From this study, majority from each age category, each year of study and increasing more in duration of clinical experience are having good practice level in ethics due to early and continuous exposure of learning good practice level of health care ethics [9].

Besides that, these findings have distinct result with Marta Losa Iglesias *et al.* that disclosed there was an association between age, level of study and duration of clinical with the level of practice of ethics because they are becoming aware and taking seriously about issues in practice ethics along with increasing their year of study and more experience they gained from clinical supervision[8]. Nevertheless, there is no association between CGPA and level of practice. This socio demographic characteristic is not investigated in previous studies.

From this study, the researcher suggested that the academic achievement by an individual is not affecting their level of practice regarding ethics. This is because CGPA result is most commonly applicable to measure with their paper examination or theory part instead of used practice level to measure their academic

performance. Jayanthi *et al.* also agreed that CGPA can be improved significantly with education compared to practice skill [5].

Lastly, based on the result of this study, it showed that there was no association between knowledge and practice. Students with good practice are believed to have good knowledge towards learning ethics. A study conducted by Lemonidou *et al.* contradicted with the result of this study which revealed that there was a significant relationship between good practice toward healthcare ethics and knowledge of ethics [7].

Ethics and law syllabus have been taught during year one in kulliyah of nursing meanwhile year two, year three and year four are applying the knowledge of ethics that they have learnt into their clinical setting. Therefore, the researcher suggests that year one, two and three of nursing students have a good level in both knowledge and practice of healthcare ethics due to early and continuous exposure of learning ethics. Also mentioned that increasing the knowledge and practice have some effects on improving the performance of health care provider and nursing students to patients [6].

CONCLUSION

It is a challenge to improve an awareness of undergraduate nursing students about the importance of learning health care ethics. They should be prepared and equipped with substantial information regarding health care ethics and ethical issues. As a result, when they become nurses, they are well trained and equipped with adequate knowledge and input regarding health care ethics to provide holistic care to the patients.

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