

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ethical Awareness among Undergraduate Nursing Students of Khyber Pukhtankhwa

HASEEN JAMAL¹, SHABANA², SHAKIRULLAH³, SHERAZ KHAN⁴, AMIR SULTAN⁵

¹Registered Nurse, Institute of Kidney Diseases Hayatabad Peshawar, KPK, Pakistan

³Principal, Florence Institute of Medical Sciences and Nursing/ KP-Pakistan

⁴Nursing Department, Bacha Khan Medical Complex Sawabi, KPK, Pakistan

⁵Nursing Department, Saidu Group of Teaching Hospital, Swat KPK

Correspondence to Amir Sultan, Email: amirsultan204@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Aim: To identify the academic ethical awareness among the undergraduate nursing students of Khyber Pukhtankhwa Pakistan.

Methodology: The study was conducted in October – November 2022 in Nursing Institutes of Khyber Pukhtankhwa while using descriptive cross-sectional design through purposive sampling technique. The data was collected through valid and reliable questionnaire having cronbach of 0.95. Data was analyzed through Microsoft excel and SPSS 20 after ethical approved by institutional review board.

Results: The ethical awareness mean score of male students were 2.4±0.91 higher than female students 2.01±0.76. Furthermore the mean score of 7th semester students were higher 2.7±0.91 than other semester students. The overall means score regarding ethical awareness among nursing students was 2.32±0.89.

Conclusion: Study concludes that the level of awareness improves with advancement to next semesters and is significantly associated with gender, age and semester.

Implications: The findings will help the nursing educators to assess the current ethical practices of undergraduate nursing students and to improve further the academic and clinical ethical practices among nursing students.

Keywords: Undergraduate nursing students, academic ethics, ethical practices

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are one of the largest frontline workforces that interact with patients in their respective departments while holding ethical standards. Academic ethics not only establish a context for the health care providers to safeguard their patients but also to assist their co-workers¹. Nursing students when complete their study then a transition period came and then entered as registered nurses for clinical practice from academic studies. Therefore, nursing educators prepare nursing students for the upcoming challenges² by developing professional and ethical behaviors in academic and clinical environments³. Ethics is an integral part of nursing practice, and without maintaining the ethical rights of patients, quality care is incomplete.

In nursing education, fostering ethical awareness in nursing students is important because later, as nurses, they have to practice it. Ethics is a collection of beliefs that define appropriate behavior both within and outside of the classroom⁴. For nursing students, ethics refers to a broad range of ethical issues confronting educators⁵. Academic ethical awareness means "understanding learning ideals and maintaining the proper attitude while engaging in all learning activities." Furthermore, academic ethics recommends that students achieve the highest level of academic success by having "a mind of respect"⁶.

The common ethical issues in nursing education, like other professions, are cheating in exams, using a smart phone in class, adding someone's name to an assignment or presentation who doesn't contribute to the activity, taking questions from all those students who already took the test or exam, false reports or data submission, and plagiarized contents in assignments. Academic misconduct for nursing students includes apart from being plagiarized and cheating on tests, but also fabricating patient's reports, competing against other students in potentially damaging ways, and violating the rights of others⁷. In other cases, undergraduate nursing students engaged in open clinical practice discussions with non-medical staff about their patients^{8,9}, recorded therapies that were not carried out during medical therapy or inaccurate vital signs were unethical actions.

Nursing educators and faculty members play a critical and visible role in establishing ethical and professional behavior¹⁰. The

Accepted on 22-02-2023

faculty must promote an environment that minimizes the possibility of dishonest behavior, fosters students' ethical development, and values the ethical principles of the nursing profession when establishing academic relationships¹¹. In order to establish this relationship, faculty members must be fair, accessible, trustworthy, sincere, attentive to upholding professional connections, and appreciative of students' individuality, dignity, and privacy¹².

One of the important parts of nursing student's education is academic knowledge because it provides foundation for nursing students how to implement their knowledge in practice and how to be a profession nurse¹³. In the context of Pakistan, there is a dearth of studies that identify the ethical awareness among undergraduate students; therefore aim of the study was to evaluate the ethical awareness of nursing students in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Study design, setting and participants: The design used for the current study was descriptive cross-sectional, while the population of this study was undergraduate nursing students enrolled in the nursing institutes of Khyber pukhtankhwa. The total students of nursing institutes were the population of the study while through online sample size calculator while using 95% confidence level, and 5% margin of error and 50% prevalence, so sample size was 265, while the data of 7 students were incomplete therefore the data of 258 was finalized using purposive sampling technique in October – November 2022. The nursing students who are enrolled in any registered nursing college of students and willing to be the part the study was the inclusion criteria of the study.

Data collection instrument and procedure: The data collection procedure contains two parts. Part one contains the demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, semester, and college status). Part two contains the *Kwon et al.* academic ethical awareness questionnaire. The questionnaire has seven dimensions and thirty items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "allow to do" to "allow not to do"¹⁴. The maximum score means a higher level of ethical awareness. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were checked by the researcher, which showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient) of the instrument in the development study was 0.95¹⁴, while the

Received on 12-12-2022

reliability of the modified questionnaire in Cho and Hwang's (2019) study showed a cronbach alpha of 0.92¹⁵.

The researcher obtained prior permission from the institute administration for data collection, and after receiving permission, a questionnaire with a consent form was distributed to students while explaining the purpose of the study and giving them the option of participating voluntarily. In the presence of the primary investigator, the students have been given 30 minutes to fill out the questionnaire and consult with the researchers in case of any questions or misunderstandings.

Data analysis and ethical consideration: Through Microsoft exam frequencies and percentages were calculated while through SPSS 20 mean and standard deviation of continuous variables were calculated. A chi-square test was applied for the association of ethical awareness with demographic variables through SPSS 20.

The research proposal, consent form, and questionnaire were submitted to the institute review board, and data collection began after approval from the ethical review board. During the data collection process, the researcher also informed each participant that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, and that the collected data would be kept confidential and used only for data analysis.

RESULTS

The study had a total of 258 participants, with men accounting for 78.3% of the total (vs. females accounting for 21.3%). In the category of age, the students aged 18–21 years were in the majority (56.2%), followed by 21–25 years (42.2%), and 26–30 years (1.6%). The students of the 4th semester scored higher (44.6%) compared to other semester students (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	Categories	n=258	Percentage
Gender	Male	202	78.3%
	Female	56	21.3 %
Age	18 – 20 years	145	56.2 %
	21 – 25 years	109	42.2 %
	26 – 30 years	4	1.6 %
BSN	1 st Semester	1	0.4 %
	2 nd Semester	47	18.2 %
	3 rd Semester	6	2.3 %
	4 th Semester	115	44.6 %
	5 th Semester	42	16.3 %
	6 th Semester	11	4.3 %
	7 th Semester	21	8.1 %
	8 th Semester	15	5.8 %
College status	Public college	240	93 %
	Private college	18	7 %

Academic ethical awareness of the participants: Mean and standard deviation was calculated for each dimension. The overall means score regarding ethical awareness among nursing students was 2.32±0.89. In the sub-dimensions the highest mean score was (2.45±0.74) of Behavior related plagiarism, followed by Inappropriate behavior in class and Cheating in exam (2.35±1.28), then Coping records of nurses (2.32±0.89), then Unfaithful behavior in clinical practice (2.28 ± 1.12), while the mean score of Dishonest behavior in clinical practice was (2.26±1.06) and in last Behavior violating confidentiality of patient (2.18±1.14) (Table 2).

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of ethical awareness dimensions

Categories	Mean ± SD
Behavior related plagiarism	2.45 ± 0.74
Inappropriate behavior in class	2.35 ± 0.87
Behavior violating confidentiality of patient	2.18 ± 1.14
Dishonest behavior in clinical practice	2.26 ± 1.06
Coping records of nurses	2.32 ± 0.89
Unfaithful behavior in clinical practice	2.28 ± 1.12
Cheating in exam	2.35 ± 1.28
Overall Mean ± SD	2.32 ± 0.89

Ethical awareness with demographic characteristics

The overall finding reveals that ethical awareness are associated with gender, age and semester (Table 3).

Table 3: Association of ethical awareness with selected variables

Categories	Gender	Age	Semester
Behavior related plagiarism	0.000	0.000	0.000
Inappropriate behavior in class	0.000	0.000	0.002
Behavior violating confidentiality of patient	0.000	0.84	0.003
Dishonest behavior in clinical practice	0.000	0.207	0.000
Coping records of nurses	0.000	0.000	0.000
Unfaithful behavior in clinical practice	0.047	0.000	0.001
Cheating in exam	0.036	0.072	0.000
Overall ethical awareness	0.000	0.000	0.000

DISCUSSION

In this study, the number of male participants was in the majority 202(78.3%), compared to female students 56(21.3%). The findings are different from a study where the number of female participants was 191(88%) more than male participants 26(12%)¹⁶, the results are also contradicted by another study where the number of female students (84%) were in majority compared to male participants (16%)¹⁷. Furthermore, in another study of ethical sensitivity, female participants outnumbered male participants (74.9%)¹⁸.

In this study, the participants' highest mean score was 2.45±0.74 for "behavior-related plagiarism" because of continuous presentation and assignments, followed by the mean scores (2.35±0.87) and 2.35±1.28) respectively, for the two subcategories of "inappropriate behavior in class" and "cheating in exams." The study conducted by Cho OH, Hwang KH, in 2019 reveals that behaviors that breach clients' respect or confidentiality, as well as exam fraud, have the highest mean scores among participants¹⁵. Another study found that American nursing students were aware of the unethical academic practices of viewing another student's exam answers, sharing patient data to people in public, and using a digital device while taking an exam¹³. In our study, the participants' mean score for exam cheating was 2.35±1.28, indicating that they have experienced and are aware of exam cheating. The study conducted in 2012 shows that only 12% of respondents said they had never engaged in any type of cheating, whereas the majority of respondents (88%) admitted to engaging in one of the studied dishonest behaviors at least once¹⁷.

In this study, the total average mean score of ethical awareness was 2.32±0.89, while the students of 7th semester (4th year) had higher ethical awareness (2.7±0.91) compared to other semester students. In a study, the overall average ethical sensitivity score of the participants was 4.93 ± 0.49, while the 3rd year students' ethical sensitivity was higher compared to other students¹⁸. In contrast to the findings of our study regarding plagiarism awareness, nursing students begin their presentation and submission of assignments for each subject in their first semester, so the faculty member emphasized that the study should avoid plagiarism and coping notes. The study by Lee, Y. J et al (2017) shows that the two types of academic misconduct that are most frequently committed are "dishonesty in clinical practice" and "plagiarism." Dishonesty in clinical practice is a subcategory that includes activities like sneaking out of the office to conduct personal business without permission, writing a case report without actually seeing the patient, checking off items on a list without actually carrying them out in clinical practice, and copying other nurses' nursing records¹⁶. Our study shows that the mean score of academic ethical awareness was 2.4±0.91 compared to female students' 2.01±0.76. The findings are similar to those of another study conducted in the United States⁸, which found that male and female students have different levels of ethical awareness¹⁵.

"Behavior violating patient confidentiality" received the lowest mean score among the participants' ethical awareness. The

lowest mean score is due to the lower exposure of nursing students to clinical duties. Initially, nursing students were less aware of ethical issues concerning patients, so they sought advice from other health workers. In another study, the findings revealed that the two most prevalent types of cheating by students in this survey were dishonesty linked to coursework (45%) and behaviors that amounted to plagiarism (60% and 57%)¹⁷ in another study, findings show that number of studies explore that plagiarism materials without providing a references as one of the most prevalent cheating behaviors; therefore, these results are broadly consistent with earlier studies¹⁹.

In this study, the findings show that academic ethical awareness is associated with age, gender, and semester. A study's findings revealed the anticipated association between students' understanding of university policies and how important they believe academic integrity to be for their academic careers, as well as how tolerant they are of infractions of it that encourage educational institutes to develop rules and regulations²⁰. In contrast, the studies suggested that junior nursing students have more moral sensitivity that provides a direction for the educators to provide education of academic ethics. In educational institutes the youths are more sensitive compared to adults so experience of lecture and exposure will prepare them to face ethical problems in future²¹.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that nursing students are aware of academic awareness, among the participants the awareness level of male is higher compared to female students. While among the categories of ethical awareness, the students were aware of plagiarism and coping with nursing notes. Behaviors that violated the confidentiality of patient may be lower due to limited exposure of nursing students with patients. The study provides a conclusion that students of initial semesters are not ethically aware but with the passage of time they identify those problems that violated academic ethics. Furthermore the study concluded that academic ethical awareness is significantly associated with gender, age and semester of study.

Conflicting Interests: The author declared that he have not conflicts of interest.

Funding: I declared that we did not receive any funding for this study.

Declaration: I declared that they content of the study is original and not submitted to any institute or journal.

REFERENCES

1. The role of ethics in nursing: Lamar University Online [Internet]. Lamar. 2017 [cited 2022Nov26]. Available from: <https://degree.lamar.edu/online-programs/healthcare/rn-to-bsn/ethics-in-nursing/>.
2. Bibi A, Ahmed F, Iqbal N, Sultan A. Factors That Affect the Performance of Undergraduate Nursing Students of Khyber Pukhtankhwa, Pakistan: Performance of Undergraduate Nursing Students. *Pakistan Journal of Health Sciences*. 2022 Aug 31:33-7.
3. Grace PJ. *Nursing ethics and professional responsibility in advanced practice*. 3 st ed. Burlington: Jones & Bartlett. Learning. 2017. p. 35-68.
4. Simoni ZR, Drentea P. ADHD, Socioeconomic Status, Medication Use, and Academic Ethic. *Sociological Focus*. 2016;49(2):119–32.
5. Corlett JA. The Role of Philosophy in Academic Ethics. *J Academic Ethics*. 2014;12:1–14.
6. Occidental College. *Academic ethics*, <http://www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics/academic-ethics> (2013, accessed 11 January 2016).
7. Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. 2016-17 academic catalog and student handbook, <http://nursing.jhu.edu/academics/documents/SchoolofNursing-HandbookCatalog.pdf> (2016, accessed 10 August 2017).
8. Krueger L. Academic dishonesty among nursing students. *J NursEduc* 2014; 53(2): 77–87.
9. Park, E. J., Park, S., & Jang, I. S. (2014). Clinical misconduct among South Korean nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 34(12), 1467–1473. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2014.04.006>
10. Jalili F, Saeidnejad Z, Aghajani M. Effects of spirituality training on the moral sensitivity of nursing students: A clinical randomized controlled trial. *Clinical Ethics*. 2020;15(1):1–10.
11. Woith W, Jenkins SD, Kerber C, editors. *Perceptions of academic integrity among nursing students*. *Nursing Forum: Wiley Online Library*; 2012.
12. Ehrich LC, Kimber M, Millwater J, Cranston N. Ethical dilemmas: A model to understand teacher practice. *Teacher Teach: Theory Pract*. 2011;17(2):173–85.
13. McCrink A. Academic misconduct in nursing students: Behaviors, attitudes, rationalizations, and cultural identity. *Journal of Nursing Education*. 2010 Nov 1;49(11):653-9.
14. Kwon, H. J., Lee, Y. M., & Lee, Y. H. (2013). Development of an inventory assessing medical students' attitudes towards academic misconduct. *Korean Journal of Medical Education*, 25(3), 211–220. <https://doi.org/10.3946/kjme.2013.25.3.211>.
15. Cho OH, Hwang KH. Academic ethical awareness among undergraduate nursing students. *Nursing ethics*. 2019 May;26(3):833-44.
16. Lee YJ, Noh JH, Choi H, Kim S. Nursing students' awareness and behaviour of academic misconduct in South Korea. *Indian J Sci Technol*. 2017 May;10(20):10-7485.
17. Theart CJ, Smit I. The status of academic integrity amongst nursing students at a nursing education institution in the Western Cape. *curationis*. 2012 Jan;35(1):1-8.
18. Hakbilen HG, Ince S, Ozgonul ML. Ethical Sensitivity of Nursing Students During a 4-Year Nursing Curriculum in Turkey. *Journal of Academic Ethics*. 2021 Jul 27:1-1.
19. McCabe DL. Academic dishonesty in nursing schools: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Nursing Education*. 2009;48(11):614-23.
20. Anohina-Naumeca A, Birzniece I, Odiņeca T. Students' awareness of the academic integrity policy at a Latvian university. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*. 2020 Dec;16(1):1-7.
21. Choi J. Cheating behaviors and related factors at a Korean dental school. *Korean Journal of Medical Education*. 2019 Sep;31(3):239.