

Research Article

Moral Development of Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: All health related jobs are faced with some problems which require moral reasoning ability to solve. One of the goals of nursing education in training students is to achieve a proper moral development. The study aimed to evaluate moral development level in the students of Bushehr University of Medical Sciences in 2015.

Methodology: A descriptive-analytical study was conducted in 2015 in the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Bushehr. Eighty-one (81) third- and fourth-year nursing students were selected to participate in the study through census method. The data collection tool included NDT questionnaire (Nursing Dilemma Test) which was based on Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire had been confirmed in previous studies. Data analysis was performed using Spss v16 statistical software and through Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric statistical tests. The significance level was considered to be p-value <0.05.

Results: In terms of moral development level, 21% of nursing students were at conventional level and 79% were at pre-conventional level. However, no one was observed at pre-conventional level. Meanwhile, there was a significant relationship between moral thinking score and marital status and place of work (ward), as well as between moral development score, gender and ward.

Conclusion: This study showed that the students were at a favorable level of moral development. Given the few number of domestic studies conducted on students' moral development, further studies in this area is recommended.

Keywords: moral development, nursing students, Kohlberg.

INTRODUCTION:

The man has a variety of moods, behaviors and mental and spiritual traits the review and evaluation of which is called ethics. This actions occur as an internal ethos of human behavior. Any individual requires a correct and logical judge and decision making in dealing with everyday issues. This ability is referred to as moral reasoning ability (1). All health related jobs are faced with problems which require moral reasoning ability to solve. This moral reasoning in nursing profession - which is most associated with patients- is more important (2). It is expected that all nurses will take humane

care of patients at a high moral level (3). Therefore, nurses should learn moral principles in their jobs as a necessity (4). Nurses must have the ability to make rational decisions about the patient's health. One of the capabilities expected from the graduated students is to acquire clinical decision-making skills. The neglect to this skill will decrease nursing service quality (5). There are many factors affecting the students' clinical decision-making including the competent instructor, clinical environment and previous experience of stress (6). One of the goals of nursing education in training students is to

achieve a proper moral development (7). Several psychologists including Kohlberg conducted extensive studies on moral reasoning. Kohlberg classified moral reasoning into six stages and three pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional levels. At pre-conventional level, people spontaneously prefer obedience based on their personal interests and pleasures to attract other's attention and to avoid any blame. At conventional level, people are obedient to social laws and principles in their decision making and at post-conventional level, people adjust their actions and behaviors in accordance with humanitarian principles and ethical conscience. Therefore, to provide care and take human decisions, nursing students' moral development level should be conventional and post-conventional (8, 9, and 10). Moreover, awareness of professional laws and regulations plays an important role in taking high quality and safe care of patients (11). According to the study conducted by Park et al. 2012 in South Korea, the students' moral development level was at an optimum level (12). The study of Callister in America in 2009 showed that the majority of nursing students were at post-conventional level (13). The study of Ahn conducted in South Korea in 2010 showed that the students' moral reasoning was at a poor level (14).

The study of Zirak et al. in Tabriz in 2011 and 2012 showed that although nurses and nursing students were at conventional and post-conventional level, still a significant number of them had a low level of moral development (10). The study of Jahanpour et al. in Bushehr also showed that nursing students had no satisfactory knowledge of professional ethics (15). Several studies also showed that the majority of nurses and nursing students had problem in taking an appropriate decision for a proper care and were not in an appropriate condition (3 and 16). Regarding the above mentioned points and the importance of ethics in nursing profession and the fact that student life is the best time to learn moral reasoning and that today's students are tomorrow's nurses, this study aimed to investigate moral development level in nursing students of Bushehr University of Medical Sciences in 2015. It is hoped that the study

results will determine the students' moral development level and improve nursing students' moral education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The descriptive-analytical study was conducted in 2015 in the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Bushehr. The study sample was selected from among all students in third and fourth year (81 subjects) through census method. Before the study, the necessary explanations were provided to all nursing students participating in the study about the study and its objectives as well as data confidentiality and informed consent was obtained from them. The data collection tool included (Nursing Dilemma Test) NDT questionnaire which was based on Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by Zirak et al. (2012) in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences and the reliability of the questionnaire was reviewed through test-retest method. To this end, the questionnaires were given to 15 nursing students within 10 days. Then, after repeating the test 2 times, the correlation coefficient of the acceptable score of Nursing Principled Thinking (NP) was obtained to be 95% (10). The first part of the questionnaire was related to the students' demographic information including age, gender, work experience, marital status, the hospital and ward in which nurses were working and residence. The second part consisted of six scenarios about the infants with severe abnormalities, forced medication, adults' demand for death, and introduction of new nurses, medication errors, and adults with severe disease in later stages of disease. Following each scenario, two main questions arise. The first question asks the student to choose the decision he/she will make in such situation. Each question has three options, one option is moral, one other is non-moral and the third one is disability to make decision. The second question asks the student to mention their reason for their choice. In this part, six common statements are presented indicating the causes of the action taken and the student is asked to choose the options in order of priority. Each of the options in each scenario represents one of the levels 2, 3,

4, 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's development and one option represents the consideration of institutional laws in decision-making. Using this questionnaire, three important indicators are calculated for each student. The first indicator is moral development level based on Kohlberg's stages which is related to the students' first choice in each scenario. The next indicator is Nursing Principled Thinking (NP) score which shows the total scores of Kohlberg's development levels 5 and 6. In order to calculate Nursing Principled Thinking (NP) score for each individual in the test, NP scores (3 to 11) will be

summed. Given that there are 6 scenarios, the total NP scores will vary between 18 and 66. The next indicator is PC (clinical considerations) score which is in accordance with administrative laws and moral decision-making. Data analysis was performed using Spss v16 statistical software and through descriptive statistical indicators such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and proper statistical tests including Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric tests. The significance level was considered to be 0.05.

RESULTS:

Eighty-one (81) nursing students participated in the study. Their mean age was 22.50 ± 51.5 . 53.1% of nursing students were male. The students were from various wards and most of them were single males (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic profile of nursing students

Demographic variable		Percentage	Number
Gender	Female	38	46.9
	Male	43	53.1
Marital status	Single	61	76.3
	Married	19	23.8
	Divorced	0	0
	Widow	0	0
Ward	internal medicine inpatient ward	13	21.3
	Surgery	19	31.1
	Emergency	13	21.3
	Children	9	14.8
	ICU	7	11.5
Residence	Bushehr	56	69.1
	Other provinces	25	30.9

In terms of moral development level, 21% of nurses were at conventional level (fourth and fifth levels of Kohlberg's moral development) and 79% were at post-conventional level (fifth and sixth levels of Kohlberg's moral development). No one was observed in pre-conventional level (first and second levels of Kohlberg's moral development).

The students' responses to the first part of (Nursing Dilemma Test) NDT scenario were presented in Table 2. 61.3% of students regarded the revival of infants with severe anomalies as necessary as other infants. 53.8% of students agreed with forced injections of drugs for patients. 84.6% of students tended to help patients breathe if the adults demanded to die. 73.4% of students believed that they should allocate enough time to introduce the new nurses. 92.6% of nurses believed that medication errors should be reported immediately.

Table 2: Students' answer to the first part of scenarios of NDT test (Nursing Dilemma Test)

Scenario	Scenario options	Number	Percentage
Infants with severe anomalies	He/she cannot decide	2	2.5
	He/she should revive the infant like other infants	49	61.3
	He/she should not revive the infant like other infants	29	36.3
Forced medication	He/she cannot decide what to do	10	12.5
	He/she should use force to inject drugs	43	53.8
	He/she should not use force to inject drugs	27	33.8
Adults' demand for death	He/she cannot decide what to do	10	12.8
	He/she should help the patient breathe	66	84.6
	He/she should not help the patient breathe	2	2.6
Introduction of new nurses	He/she cannot decide what to do	17	21.5

	He/she should devote enough time to introduce the new nurse	58	73.4
	He/she should not devote any time to introduce the new nurse	4	5.1
Medication errors	He/she cannot decide what to do	3	3.7
	He/she should report the medication errors immediately	75	92.6
	He/she should not report the medication errors immediately	3	3.7
Adults with severe disease in later stages	He/she cannot decide what to do	9	11.1
	He/she should respond to the patient's questions	23	28.4
	He/she should not respond to the patient's questions	49	60.5

The average moral development score in nurses was 5.27 ± 0.99 . The average NP score was 44.97 ± 3.65 and the average score of clinical considerations was 21.27 ± 3.15 . There was a significant relationship between nursing principled thinking (NP), marital status and the ward the nurses were working at. There was also a significant relationship between moral development score and the ward and gender (p -value < 0.05 and Table 3). Moral development score in female students was higher than males. The highest score of moral development was related to the intensive care unit (ICU) and the highest NP score was observed in the internal medicine inpatient ward and among married students.

Table 3: The relationship between some specifications of the students of Bushehr University of Medical Sciences and clinical considerations and NP thinking

		Clinical considerations (PC)		p-value	Nursing Principled Thinking (NP)		p-value	Moral development		p-value
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
Gender	Female	21.32	2.58	0.621	46.16	2.71	0.073	5.58	0.62	0.010
	Male	21.23	3.61		43.93	4.07		5.55	0.84	
Ward	internal medicine inpatient ward	19.08	3.90	0.0672	46.31	0.75	0.002	5.90	0.24	0.049
	Surgery	22.11	3		42.32	4.12		5.08	0.84	
	Emergency	22.31	2.06		43.46	2.79		5.74	0.65	
	Children	22	2		46.22	1.09		5.81	0.57	
	ICU	23	1.41		44.86	3.89		5.98	0.70	
Marital status	Single	21.28	3.19	0.971	44.38	3.61	0.016	5.67	0.78	0.234
	Married	21.16	3.17		46.84	3.32		5.90	0.71	
hospital	Bentolhoda	22.63	2.33	0.362	45.63	2.92	0.171	6.31	0.66	0.312
	Khalij Fars	21.27	2.88		44.5	3.68		5.54	0.73	
	TaminEjtemaee	20.33	4.13		46.33	0.52		5.94	0.09	
Residence	Bushehr	21.16	3.44	0.671	45.13	3.42	0.309	5.73	0.67	0.25
	Other provinces	21.52	2.42		44.64	4.18		5.74	0.96	

DISCUSSION:

The study was conducted to determine nursing students' development level. The results showed that 79% of students were at conventional level and 21% were at post-conventional level. Meanwhile, according to the studies conducted in Iran including the study of Rege et al. in 2012, 88% of students were at conventional and post-conventional levels (16). The study of Zirak et al. in Tabriz in 2011 showed that 75% of students were at conventional and post-conventional levels (10). The study of Borhani et al. in 2010 which compared the moral reasoning level of final-year students with that of the nurses working in Kerman City showed that the students obtained higher moral reasoning score compared to nurses and they

were more at conventional and post-conventional level (2). Moreover, among the studies conducted abroad, the study of Park et al. in South Korea in 2012 on nursing students showed that students were at a desirable level of moral reasoning (12). The study of Callister in America in 2009 also showed that nursing students were at post-conventional level of moral development (13). All these studies were consistent with the present study and showed the desirable and effective condition of professional ethics training in universities. However, given that we are living in an Islamic country adherent to ethics and humanity where nurses deal with patients more than anyone else, it is expected that after graduation and employment in hospitals, nursing students will follow moral and

ethical principles and remain at high level of morality just the same as their student life. Other studies were also carried out inside and outside Iran including the study of Ahn et al. in South Korea which showed that students were at a low level of moral reasoning (14). The study of Buzgova in the Czech Republic in 2011 showed that the students' moral reasoning and sensitivity was at a low level (17). Moreover, the study of Jahanpour et al. in 2013 showed that nursing students were not at a desired level of professional ethics awareness (15). Meanwhile, it seems that nursing professors' adherence to professional ethics has a significant impact on the students' moral development. The study of Badiepeima et al. examined the professors' adherence to professional ethics in clinics from the viewpoint of nursing students in nursing school of Jahrom hospital in 2013, indicating the relative satisfaction of students (18). The implementation year of the above mentioned studies the results of which are inconsistent with the present study and the ethics education progress in universities and adding the professional ethics course to university courses and holding annual ethics workshops explain the recent difference. In this study, there is a limitation in the number of samples which is due to the selection of third and fourth-year students, because during these two years, students spend more time in the hospital and at patients' bedside considering their training program.

CONCLUSION:

The results showed that students were at a desirable level of moral development. According to the present study suggesting that all nursing students were at conventional and post-conventional level, it is expected that nurses will remain at high level of moral development when starting work after graduation and over time. Given that moral reasoning ability is achieved based on student life learning and that dealing with people and issues related to moral considerations has a remarkable impact on durability of moral decisions, it is recommended that planned workshops should be regularly and annually held and professional ethics should be taught from the very first year of students' admission to

the university. Moreover, due to the limitations of domestic studies on the students' moral development, further studies is recommended in this area.

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