

Ethical Values in the Nursing Profession as Perceived by Head Nurses and Staff Nurses in Public Hospitals, Banda Aceh, Indonesia: A comparison Study

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Purpose: Identify the levels of importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by the head nurses and the staff nurses, and compare the levels of importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by head nurses and those as perceived by staff nurses in public hospitals, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Methods: Data collected from 79 head nurses and 280 staff nurses were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U test.

Results: The total mean score of the importance of ethical values in the nursing profession perceived by head nurses and staff nurses are at a high level. The top 3 mean scores of the importance of ethical values in the nursing profession perceived by head nurses included caring, autonomy, and confidentiality. Meanwhile, the top 3 mean scores of the importance of ethical values in the nursing profession perceived by staff nurses included caring, confidentiality, and non maleficence. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that head nurses perceived accountability as significantly statistically different from staff nurses.

Conclusion: Although head nurses and staff nurses mostly perceived the importance of ethical values in the nursing profession at high levels, it is still need to promote some ethical values of head nurses and staff nurses.

Key words: Ethical values, nursing profession, head nurses, staff nurses.

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Introduction

Values are ideals, beliefs, customs, modes of conduct, qualities, or goals that are highly prized or preferred by individuals, groups, and societies (Burkhardt & Nathaniel, 2002). According to Fry and Johnstone (2002), some values relate to ethics but some values do not relate to ethics. Values related to ethics or ethical values are the backbone to guide nurses to act, behave and deal with different moral situations (Jonasson, Liss, Westerlind, & Berterö, 2010). Ethical values in the nursing profession are very important for the patients, nurses, organizations, and the nursing profession itself. Ethical values as fundamental values provide direction for the practice of nursing (Jormsri, Kunaviktikul, Ketefian, & Chaowalit, 2005). If nurses understand how to articulate ethical values in nursing, they can provide good nursing care, have great job satisfaction, help improve nurse retention, and develop a harmonious organization (Horton, Tschudin, & Forget, 2007). Nonetheless, if nurses have limitations in understanding the ethical values, it will have impact on problem solving, critical thinking, prioritization of care needs, and the attention paid to patients and families. All of these are important in influencing the quality of care (Altun, 2003; Leners, Roehrs, & Piccone, 2006).

There is a link between values and culture. Horton et al. (2007) conducted a literature review to establish whether global values of nursing had changed in the previous five years. They revealed some similarities and differences in ethical values between western and eastern countries. For instance, the similarities between ethical values in China and Iran can be defined as social-cultural aspects in the region. Ethical values in Iran were influenced by Islam while in China ethical values were based on Buddhist concepts and principles. Furthermore, ethics are universal and come from the natural laws of human beings, and share common values in their lives. However, differences in cultures, geography, and societies may influence ethical values.

The culture in Banda Aceh, Indonesia may have an effect on the ethical values of people in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Values in Banda Aceh are influenced by Islam because the majority of the people are Muslim. Life is based on the rules of Islam providing guidance in everyday life for people in Banda Aceh. Regarding ethical issues, male nurses in Banda Aceh take care of male patients and female nurses in Banda Aceh take care of female patients. However, in some situations, when there is a shortage of nursing professionals, a nurse may have to take care of patients who are not the same gender as the nurse.

In another context the Indonesian society holds a deep conviction cooperation, which is called “gotong royong” in the Indonesian language or “communal self-help”. Indonesian tradition hold that at every moment ethical values can be integrated into such things, as a wedding party, a moment of passing away, cleaning the housing environment, and what ever the boss wants to set as the goal in the workplace. All these things can be done by working together. Therefore, this study analyses the importance of ethical values between the perception of head nurses and staff nurses in public hospitals, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. There are any cases, for instance autonomy in Indonesia based on physician. Then, the patients cannot directly to make decision based on themselves.

The conceptual framework used in this study was composed of six ethical principles proposed by Beauchamp and Childress (2001) and four ethical concepts proposed by Fry and Johnstone (2002). The six ethical principles include autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, confidentiality, and veracity. Autonomy was defined as the right to make one’s own decision when the individual is given independent and personal choices. Beneficence referred to helping patients gain what is beneficial for them in order to promote. Them nonmaleficence referred to an obligation not to inflict harm on others. Justice refers to fair, equitable, and taking proper care of individuals based on their needs. Confidentiality means an agreement to keep promises and hold information that is given by other persons. Veracity

refers to telling the truth and not deceiving others.

The four ethical concepts include advocacy, accountability, cooperation, and caring. Advocacy is defined as the active support of an important cause. Accountability refers to being answerable for one's actions, and it entails giving satisfactory reasons and explanations for one's actions or how one has carried out one's responsibilities. Cooperation refers to the nursing action of keeping a promise, working with other personnel to reach a purpose or goal and encouraging mutual relationships. Caring means values in the nurse-patient relationship which is composed of four concepts including being there for the patient, respecting for the patient, feeling with and for the patient, and trying to be close with the patient. In this study the researcher used 6 ethical principles and 4 ethical concepts to develop questionnaire to measure 10 components of ethical values among head nurses and staff nurses in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Objectives

The objectives of this study included: (1) to identify the level of importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by head nurses, (2) to identify the level of importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by staff nurses, and (3) to compare the levels of importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by head nurses and those as perceived by staff nurses in public hospitals, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Methods

Sample

Proportionate sampling was used to recruit staff nurses from public hospitals in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Respondents in this study included 79 head nurses and 280 staff nurses who were working in their positions for at least 1 year. For head nurses, all head nurses who met the inclusion criteria were included in this study. The inclusion criteria of both respondents as

follows: inclusion criteria for head nurses were minimum working experience of 1 year as head nurse. For staff nurses, the inclusion criteria was minimum working experience at least 1 year as staff nurse.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study consisted of 2 parts: the demographic data form and the Ethical Values Questionnaire. The demographic data form assessed the following items: age, gender, level of education, current job position, length of time of working experience as head nurse or staff nurse, and experience in conferences/seminars/workshop related to nursing ethics.

The Ethical Values Questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on six ethical principles (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001) and four ethical concepts (Fry & Johnstone, 2002). The Ethical Values Questionnaire was composed of 60 items based on 10 components including autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, telling the truth, confidentiality, advocacy, accountability, cooperation, and caring. Each item assessed the importance of ethical value components perceived by the subjects. The answers were based on 5 Likert scales that ranged from 1 to 5 (very low = 1; low = 2; moderate = 3; high = 4; and very high = 5). The validity of the ethical value instruments was tested for content validity by four experts. The experts were asked to check the relevancy and whether the items represent ethical values in the nursing profession. The content validity index (CVI) was .89. The questionnaire was modified by the researcher based on experts' recommendation. The reliability of the Ethical Values Questionnaire was tested with 20 head nurses and 20 staff nurses in private hospitals yielding a Cronbach alpha of .89 and .96, respectively.

Ethical consideration

The study procedure was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University and public hospitals in Banda Aceh. The researcher

met the subjects directly and explained the purpose of the study and methods of data collection. Potential subjects were informed regarding the study confidentiality and anonymity. They were also informed that they have the right to withdrawal from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Respondents who decided to participate in this study were asked to sign an informed consent form.

Data analysis

The demographic data and the level of importance of ethical values were analyzed by using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentage, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test mean rank differences of ethical values perceived by head nurses and those perceived by staff nurses.

Results

Demographic data

Respondents in this study were composed of 79 head nurses and 280 staff nurses. Most of head nurses were female; the age of head nurses ranged from 30 to 56 years old. Nearly half of head nurses were between 35 to 44 years old. The majority held a bachelor degree, followed by diploma three, and diploma four. Length of working in the present position for head nurses ranged from 1 to 30 years. Only 39.2% of head nurses had attended a seminar/workshop/conference on the ethical values' topic.

Most of the staff nurses were female; their age ranged from 22 to 57 years old. More than half of staff nurses were 25 to 44 years old. The majority of them held diploma and diploma four. The length of working in the present position ranged from 1 to 27 years. More than half of them had never attended a seminar/workshop/conference related to ethics on the following topics: ethics in nursing, ethical and law, ethical decision making, ethical dilemma and others (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation of Head Nurses and Staff Nurses Demographic Characteristics (N = 359)

Characteristics	Head nurses (n ₁ = 79)		Staff nurses (n ₂ = 280)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	22	27.8	61	21.8
Female	57	72.2	219	78.2
Age (year)				
25 – 34	12	15.2	177	63.2
35 – 44	34	43.0	80	28.6
45 – 54	31	39.2	21	7.5
> 54	2	2.5	2	0.7
	(M = 41.86, SD = 7.22) (Min-Max = 30-56)		(M = 32.88, SD = 6.85) (Min- Max = 22-57)	
Level of education				
Diploma three	28	35.4	179	63.9
Bachelor's degree	35	44.3	74	26.4
Diploma four	16	20.3	27	9.6
Length of working in present position	(M = 7.52, SD = 6.25) (Min- Max =1.0-30.0)		M = 7.09, SD = 5.36 Min- Max = 1.0-27.0)	
1-5 years	38	48.1	136	48.6
6-10 years	27	34.2	105	37.5
11-15 years	6	7.6	15	5.4
16-20 years	3	3.8	9	3.2
> 20 years	5	6.3	15	9.4
Experience in seminar/workshop/conference				
No	48	60.8	167	59.6
Yes	31	39.2	113	40.4
Topic of seminar/workshop/conference				
Ethics in nursing	25	80.6	86	76.1
Ethics and law	0	0	13	11.5
Ethical decision making	3	9.7	2	1.8
Ethical dilemma	1	3.2	1	0.9
Others	2	6.5	11	9.7

The level of Importance of Ethical Values in the Nursing Profession, as Perceived by Head Nurses and Staff Nurses.

The findings showed that the total mean score of the importance of ethical values in the nursing profession as perceived by head nurses and staff nurses were at a high level. The top 3 highest mean scores of ethical values perceived by head nurses included caring, autonomy, and confidentiality whereas the lowest mean score was justice.

The top 3 highest mean scores of the importance of ethical values perceived by staff nurses included caring, confidentiality, and nonmaleficence whereas the lowest mean score was accountability as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and Level of Importance of Ethical Values in the Nursing Profession Perceived by Head Nurses and Staff Nurses (N = 359)

No	Ethical values	Head Nurses (n ₁ = 79)		Staff Nurses (n ₂ = 280)	
		Mean (SD)	Level	Mean (SD)	Level
1.	Ethical values related to autonomy	4.50 (.40)	High	4.44 (.40)	High
2.	Ethical values related to beneficence	4.45 (.46)	High	4.41 (.46)	High
3.	Ethical values related to nonmaleficence	4.48 (.55)	High	4.45 (.51)	High
4.	Ethical values related to justice	4.30 (.52)	High	4.22 (.51)	High
5.	Ethical values related to telling the truth	4.33 (.53)	High	4.22 (.54)	High
6.	Ethical values related to confidentiality	4.50 (.44)	High	4.47 (.48)	High
7.	Ethical values related to advocacy	4.40 (.52)	High	4.39 (.48)	High
8.	Ethical values related to accountability	4.33 (.50)	High	4.17 (.55)	High
9.	Ethical values related to cooperation	4.48 (.47)	High	4.35 (.60)	High
10.	Ethical values related to caring	4.51 (.56)	High	4.47 (.56)	High
	Total scores	4.43 (.35)	High	4.36 (.39)	High

Importance of Ethical Values as Perceived by Head Nurses Compared with Staff Nurses.

The results showed that there was only one component (accountability) of ethical values which head nurses perceived higher than staff nurses. The difference is statistically significant ($p = .04$). For the other components, were not statistically significant different ($p > .05$).

Table 3. The Importance of Ethical Values between the Perception of Head Nurses and Staff Nurses using the Mann-Whitney U test

No	Ethical values	Head nurses (n ₁ = 79)	Staff Nurses (n ₂ = 280)	Z	p
		Mean Rank	Mean Rank		
1.	Ethical values related to autonomy	192.36	176.51	-1.20	.22
2.	Ethical values related to beneficence	187.72	177.82	-0.75	.45
3.	Ethical values related to nonmaleficence	185.47	178.46	-0.54	.58

No	Ethical values	Head nurses (n ₁ = 79)	Staff Nurses (n ₂ = 280)	Z	p
		Mean Rank	Mean Rank		
4.	Ethical values related to related to justice	194.11	176.02	-1.38	.16
5.	Ethical values related to telling the truth	196.08	175.46	-1.60	.10
6.	Ethical values related to confidentiality	182.27	179.36	-0.22	.82
7.	Ethical values related to advocacy	184.93	178.61	-0.48	.62
8.	Ethical values related to accountability	201.05	174.06	-2.04	.04
9.	Ethical values related to cooperation	193.19	176.28	-1.32	.18
10.	Ethical values related to caring	185.80	178.36	-0.55	.55

Discussions

The findings showed that head nurses were older than staff nurses, because the head nurses had been working as longer than staff nurses. The reason is as head nurse, he/she had been working longer than staff nurses. The regulation in Indonesia mention about the requirement of head nurse position that he/she graduated from bachelor degree.

In addition, head nurses had a higher level of education than staff nurses. Meanwhile, the majority of staff nurses graduated from diploma three. According to the regulations, Indonesia government had changed the health care regulation by allowing the minimum standard for nursing entry to practice in the health care system in Indonesia. The staff nurses are recruited to complete at least diploma, three years nursing course which conducted in nursing school and students come from senior high school.

The majority of subjects in this study (head nurses and staff nurses) took on their position within the previous 5 years According to the hospital policies, staff positions are changed every 5 years.

A number of head nurses and staff nurses in this study had no experience participating in a seminar/workshop/conference. It is possible that the local institutions have limited human

resources, especially in the area of ethics and budget. In addition, the national policies for human development might not set ethical issues as a primary priority in conferences/workshops.

However, 39.2% of the head nurses and 40.4% of the staff nurses had experience of participating in seminar/workshop/conference, especially in topics of ethics including ethics in nursing, ethical decision making, and ethical dilemma. It is possible that these subjects considered as important ethical issues in the nursing profession.

Head nurses and staff nurses perceived “caring” as the first priority of ethical values in the nursing profession. It is because of caring is the essence of nursing (Watson, 2008). The caring action involves a balance of the hand (skill), the head (protocol and evidence) and with the heart (ethical and human dimensions) (Galvin, 2010). Some factors may influence ethical values such as religion and culture. This study was conducted in Aceh, where most nurses are Muslims. Based on the principles of the religion, people are taught to help each other. This may also have an influence on the ethical values of caring.

The head nurses perceived “autonomy” as the second priority and “confidentiality” as the third priority. Nevertheless, staff nurses perceived “confidentiality” as the second priority and “nonmaleficence” as the third priority. The reason why head nurses were concerned more about autonomy because of the head nurses have to take the role of decision maker. Autonomy was defined as the right to self-determination and self-direction, even meet challenges, obstacles, and disadvantages (Shaw & Degazon, 2008). Autonomy allows a person to make decision by oneself based on evidence she/he has. One view is that, the person should prepare to accept any outcome of his/her decision. Autonomy is an important characteristic of administrative personnel (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001).

While, staff nurses were concerned less about “autonomy” than head nurses. It is possible that staff nurses have to deal with decision making less than head nurses. Both head

nurses and staff nurses in this study perceived “confidentiality” as a primary important component of ethical values. It is probably that the respondents understood that “confidentiality” is very important for the nursing profession. Confidentiality is one of the most fundamental ethics for the health care professional (Fry & Johnstone, 2002). Owing to the nurses care for patients, it is important the nurses’ responsibility should keep promises and hold information to the patients and their families (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). It is widely argued that confidentiality was stated as one of the most important ethical or moral values in supervision as well (Berggren, Begat, & Severinnson, 2002), confidentiality is necessary in the nursing profession regard to ethical values.

In this study “nonmaleficence” was included in the top 3 of ethical values as perceived by staff nurses, but was not included in the top 3 of ethical values as perceived by head nurses. “Nonmaleficence” refers mostly to the responsible way nurses improve nursing care for the patients. It is also important for staff nurses to provide safe care and improve the care without harm to the patients.

Head nurses in this study perceived that “justice” as the least important of the ethical variables, whereas staff nurses perceived that “accountability” as the least important ethical variable. Finding from this study revealed that only the “accountability” component of ethical values as perceived by the head nurses was statistically significantly different from the staff nurses ($Z = -2.04$, $p = .04$). It was indicated that the head nurses and staff nurses perceived the importance of ethical variables in the nursing profession in the same direction and at a high level. Only “accountability” was perceived by the head nurses to statistically significantly higher than the staff nurses.

Considering accountability as an ethical value, for the staff nurses being accountable or responsible in nursing mean to be able to work independently and honestly based on the scope of nursing practice.

Conclusion

The importance of ethical values as perceived head nurses and staff nurses in public hospital, Banda Aceh, Indonesia was found to be at a high level which can be applied to develop strategies to promote the importance of ethical values.

There are 3 implications from this study: nursing education, nursing research, and nursing administration. The first is nursing education: as evidence to develop a curriculum for moral and ethics courses in nursing school. The second is nursing research: it can be as evidence based nursing that is concerned about nursing ethics related to ethical values. Thirdly, nursing administration: the present study provides new perspectives in nursing ethics for conducting activities (seminars/workshops/conferences).

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