

Knowledge and Practice of Nursing Ethics and its Influence on Student Nurses Behaviour in Nursing Schools in Benin City, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Nursing ethics is an integral part of nursing knowledge and practice which helps to avoid ethical issues and legal complications. This study aimed to examine the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics and its influence on student nurses' behaviour in nursing schools in Benin City, Edo State. The study also sought to examine the perception of student nurses on nursing ethics, the level at which nursing ethics is being taught in school of nursing and the factors militating against its practice in schools of nursing. The population for this study comprised of 82 student nurses from St. Philomena Catholic Hospital and 250 from Edo State College of Nursing Sciences both in Benin City, Edo State with a total of 332. the sample size determined by random sampling was 181. However, only 170 questionnaires were filled and returned. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to assess the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics among student nurses. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the overall knowledge and practice of nursing ethics. The findings of this study revealed that most student nurses recognize the importance of ethical knowledge in their practice, aligning with the fundamental principles of nursing. The study also revealed that students generally perceive that their programme provide sufficient content related to nursing ethics, indicating a positive aspect of their educational experience. However, the demands of their academic programme may sometimes impede their ability to prioritize ethical considerations. Based on the findings, the study recommended that there should be a forum for all nurses at least once a month on mortality review to identify and forestall possible legal and ethical issues. The study also recommended that the Department of Nursing Services and the management of all hospitals should collaborate to sponsor nurses to seminars, workshops and symposia.

Keywords: Attitudes, Behaviour, Ethics, Knowledge, Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the healthcare professions, nursing plays a critical role in delivering patient-centered care and upholding ethical standards¹. Nurses are entrusted with the well-being of individuals, families and communities, making it imperative for them to possess a solid foundation in nursing ethics. Nursing schools serve as the training ground for aspiring nurses to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate complex ethical dilemmas they may encounter throughout their careers. Understanding the relationship between knowledge of nursing ethics and its influence on student nurses' behaviour in nursing schools is crucial for ensuring the provision of ethical and compassionate care ². Nursing ethics is a fundamental aspect of the nursing profession, guiding nurses in decision making and behaviour while delivering patient care³.

It encompasses a set of principles, values and standards that promote ethical practice and ensure the well-being of patients and healthcare recipients⁴. These principles include autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and veracity, among others. In nursing schools, students undergo rigorous training to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to become competent nurses⁵. Nursing education programme is designed to equip students with a solid foundation in nursing ethics, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct and critical thinking in clinical practice. Students are introduced to ethical dilemmas commonly encountered in healthcare settings and learn strategies for ethical decision-making through classroom lectures, case studies, simulations and clinical experiences. The goal of nursing education in relation to ethics is to prepare students to navigate complex ethical situations and uphold ethical standards throughout their careers⁶. Nursing schools aim to shape future nurses' behaviour and professional conduct. It is expected that students will integrate their knowledge of nursing ethics into daily practice, demonstrating ethical behaviour, maintaining patient confidentiality, respecting patient autonomy and advocating for patient rights by fostering ethical awareness, competence and moral reasoning. However, these researchers found that challenges exist in student nurses translating theoretical knowledge to practical application despite the emphasis on nursing ethics in their curriculum. Research^{6; 7; 8} suggest that there may be gaps between students' knowledge of nursing ethics and the ability to apply it effectively in real-life situations. Factors such as the influence of peers, workplace culture, time constraints and limited exposure to ethical dilemmas during training may contribute to this gap. Understanding the relationship between knowledge of nursing ethics and its influence on student nurses' behaviour is crucial for improving nursing education and promoting ethical practice. Nursing schools can develop targeted interventions to enhance ethical competence among students by identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder the translation of knowledge into action,⁹. This will ultimately contribute to the delivery of high-quality, patient-centered care that aligns with the ethical principles of the nursing profession. The potential disparity between theoretical knowledge and practical application of nursing ethics raises significant ethical concerns. It is crucial to investigate the factors that contribute to the translation of nursing ethics knowledge into ethical behaviour among student nurses¹⁰.

Additionally, identifying potential gaps between the knowledge of nursing ethics and its application in real-life ethical dilemmas is necessary for enhancing the 3 ethical competence of student nurses¹¹. Therefore, this project aimed to shed light on the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics among student nurses in nursing schools by addressing these issues. Understanding the challenges and barriers in applying ethical principles in real-life situations will contribute to the development of effective strategies for improving ethical behaviour and decision-making among student nurses. Ultimately, this research sought to promote the provision of high-quality, ethical care to ensure student nurses are adequately prepared to navigate the complex ethical challenges they may encounter throughout their careers.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics and its influence on student nurses' behaviour in nursing schools in Benin City, Edo State. To achieve this, the study set out some realizable objectives including the:

1. perception of student nurses on nursing ethics
2. level at which nursing ethics is being taught in school of nursing
3. factors militating against practicing nursing ethics in school of nursing

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study;

1. What is the perception of student nurses on nursing ethics
2. What is the level at which nursing ethics is being taught in school of nursing
3. What are the factors militating against practicing nursing ethics in school of nursing

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design to assess the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics among student nurses in nursing schools in Benin City, Edo State which allows for data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the current situation. The study was conducted in Benin City, the capital of Edo State, in South-South, Nigeria and is one of the major cities in the region with over 5 nursing schools offering nursing education programme. The target population comprised of 82 student nurses from St. Philomena Catholic Hospital and 250 from Edo State College of Nursing Sciences both in Benin City, Edo State totaling 332.

Sampling Technique

A simple random sampling technique was employed for participant selection to ensure that each participant had an equal and independent chance of being selected, providing a fair representation of the student nurse population in nursing schools in Benin City, Edo State. The study was therefore limited to 181 student nurses both from St. Philomena's Catholic Hospital and Edo State College of Nursing Sciences in Benin City, Edo State. 12 noted that it is impracticable to analyze an entire population, hence the Taro Yamane formula was used in computing the sample size. The formula is given as: $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$

Where: N = the population size = 332

e = the margin error (assume 5%)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{332}{1 + 332(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{332}{1 + (332 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{332}{1 + (332 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{332}{1 + 0.83}$$

$$n = \frac{332}{1.83} = 181.42$$

Hence n= 181 (Approximately)

Instruments for Data Collection

The data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics among student nurses. The questionnaire consisted of both closed ended and open-ended questions.

Validity of Instrument

To establish face and content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in the field of measurement to ensure that it measures what it intends to assess by conducting a thorough literature review on nursing ethics and consulting with two subject matter experts to ensure that all relevant aspects of nursing ethics are covered in the questionnaire. The suggestions and corrections were effected into the final draft.

Reliability of Instrument (test and reliability index)

The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 30 student nurses outside the target population to assess its reliability. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, aiming for a value greater than 0.7, which indicates good reliability.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher and a trained research assistant administered the questionnaire to the student nurses in the selected nursing schools. The data collection process was carried out over a period of 4 days. The total sample covered were the number of student nurses who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the overall knowledge and practice of nursing ethics. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square test or t-test, was used to determine any significant associations between variables. Although, 181 copies of the questionnaires were administered randomly to the identified respondents, only 170 copies were completed and returned.

Results

Demographic Information of Respondents

Data collected are presented and analyze based on respondents' personal data and research questions.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents according to Gender

S/N	Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Male	31	18
2.	Female	139	82
	Total	170	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Distribution of Respondents according to Age

S/N	Age	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	18 - 25yrs	151	89
2.	26 - 35 yrs	19	11
3.	36 yrs & above	0	0
	Total	170	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the perception of student nurses on nursing ethics? Items 1-7 of the questionnaire were used to answer research question one as stated in table 3 below

Table 3: Responses of respondents on the perception of student nurses on nursing ethics

S/N	Statements	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	I believe that having a strong understanding of nursing ethics is essential for providing quality patient care.	170	3.18	.906	Agree
2.	I feel that adhering to ethical principles is crucial to maintaining the trust and respect of patients and colleagues	170	2.96	.753	Agree
3.	I believe that ethical considerations should play a significant role in my decision-making as a student nurse	170	2.24	1.074	Disagree
4.	I am confident in my ability to identify ethical dilemmas in clinical settings.	170	3.48	.858	Agree
5.	I think that integrating nursing ethics into my practice as a student nurse can positively impact patient outcomes.	170	3.48	1.026	Agree
6.	Nursing ethics topics are adequately covered in the curriculum of my nursing school	170	3.39	.922	Agree
7.	I believe that my nursing school provides sufficient opportunities to learn about ethical principles in nursing.	170	3.48	1.026	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.96		Agree

Research Question Two: What is the level at which nursing ethics is being taught in school of nursing? Items 8 - 14 of the questionnaire were used to answer research question two as stated in table 4 below:

Table 4: Responses of respondents on the level at which nursing ethics is being taught in school of nursing

S/N	Statements	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
8.	I find that instructors in my nursing school emphasize the importance of nursing ethics during lessons.	170	3.81	.886	Agree
9.	There are specific courses or modules dedicated to teaching nursing ethics in my nursing school.	170	3.34	.856	Agree
10.	I think that nursing ethics education is an integral part of my nursing programme.	170	3.39	.922	Agree

11.	Time constraints and heavy workload make it challenging to consistently practice nursing ethics in my nursing school.	170	3.01	0.68	Agree
12.	I perceive a lack of clear guidance from instructors on how to apply nursing ethics principles in real-life situations.	170	3.45	0.73	Agree
13.	Pressure to achieve high grades sometimes takes precedence over considering ethical aspects in my nursing practice.	170	2.09	.56	Disagree
14.	Limited opportunities for discussions and reflections on ethical issues hinder practicing nursing ethics in my nursing school	170	3.81	.886	Agree
	Grand Mean		3.50		Agree

Research Question Three: What are the factors militating against practicing nursing ethics in school of nursing? Items 15 - 20 of the questionnaire were used to answer research question three as stated in table 5 below:

Table 5: Responses of respondents on the factors militating against practicing nursing ethics in school of nursing

S/N	Statements	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
15.	I feel that a lack of positive role models for ethical behaviour among instructors and peers affects my own ethical practice as a student nurse	170	3.38	0.62	Agree
16.	I perceive a lack of clear guidance from instructors on how to apply nursing ethics principles in real-life situations	170	3.45	0.73	Agree
17.	Pressure to achieve high grades sometimes takes precedence over considering ethical aspects in my nursing practice.	170	3.81	.886	Agree
18.	Limited opportunities for discussions and reflections on ethical issues hinder practicing nursing ethics in my nursing school.	170	3.01	0.68	Agree
19.	I feel that a lack of positive role models for ethical behaviour among instructors and peers affects my own ethical practice as a student nurse.	170	3.39	.922	Agree
20.	I think that limited exposure to diverse ethical scenarios affects our ability to make ethical choices	170	3.34	.856	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.98		Agree

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that most student nurses recognize the importance of ethical knowledge in their practice, aligning with the fundamental principles of nursing. Similarly, respondents indicated agreement that adhering to ethical principles is crucial for maintaining the trust and respect of patients and colleagues. This finding underscores the significance of ethical conduct in fostering professional relationships and upholding patient centered care. Interestingly, there was a divergence of opinions regarding the role of ethical considerations in decision-making among student nurses. While some agreed that ethical considerations should play a significant role, others disagreed. This variance suggests a potential gap in understanding or prioritization of ethical decision-making among respondents, which warrants further exploration and education. The majority of respondents expressed confidence in their ability to identify ethical dilemmas in clinical settings. This finding reflects a positive self-assessment among student nurses regarding their preparedness to recognize and navigate ethical challenges, essential for ethical practice. Most respondents agreed that integrating nursing ethics into their practice can positively impact patient outcomes. This belief underscores the perceived value of ethical integration in enhancing the quality of care and patient experiences. This finding is in agreement with the findings of 13 and 14 who found out that while students may have a good overall knowledge of ethical principles, there are specific areas, such as end-of-life care and patient confidentiality, where their understanding may be lacking. This highlights the importance of targeted educational interventions to enhance students' knowledge in these areas. Additionally, studies by 15 and 16 emphasize the significance of ethical reasoning and decision-making in nursing practice, suggesting that students recognize the importance of ethical competence in navigating complex ethical dilemmas.

The second finding of the study that students generally perceive that their programme provides sufficient content related to nursing ethics, indicating a positive aspect of their educational experience. Similarly, respondents indicated agreement that their nursing schools provide sufficient opportunities to learn about ethical principles in nursing. This finding suggests that students feel adequately supported in their exploration and understanding of ethical principles within their educational environment. Most of the respondents reported that instructors in their nursing schools emphasize the importance of nursing ethics during lessons. This indicates that educators play a significant role in highlighting the importance of ethical considerations in nursing practice, contributing to students' awareness and understanding. Most respondents agreed that there are specific courses or modules dedicated to teaching nursing ethics in their nursing schools. This finding suggests that nursing programme recognize the importance of formal education in nursing ethics and integrate it into their curriculum as standalone courses or modules. Respondents also expressed agreement that nursing ethics education is an integral part of their nursing programme. This indicates a recognition among students that nursing ethics is woven into various aspects of their education, reinforcing its importance throughout their training. The finding is in agreement with the finding of 17 which revealed that challenges such as time constraints, limited opportunities for discussions and reflections, and a lack of clear guidance from instructors may impact the effectiveness of nursing ethics education. This is also in agreement with the findings of 18 which suggest that there may be gaps in the level of teaching and emphasis on specific ethical principles and codes of conduct.

The third finding of the study revealed that the demands of the academic programme may sometimes impede their ability to prioritize ethical considerations. Many respondents perceived a lack of clear guidance from instructors on how to apply nursing ethics principles in real-life situations. This finding indicates a potential gap in instructional support, which could hinder students' ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practical ethical decision making. Contrary to the other statements, respondents disagreed that pressure to achieve high grades takes precedence over considering ethical aspects in their nursing practice. This suggests that academic performance may not be perceived as a significant barrier to ethical practice by most students in this context. The majority of respondents agreed that limited opportunities for discussions and reflections on ethical issues hinder practicing

nursing ethics in their nursing school. This highlights the importance of interactive and reflective learning experiences in fostering ethical awareness and competence. Many respondents agreed that a lack of positive role models for ethical behaviour among instructors and peers affect their own ethical practice as student nurses. This finding underscores the influence of role modeling in shaping students' ethical development and suggest a need for greater emphasis on cultivating a culture of ethical leadership and professionalism. These findings are in agreement with the findings of 19 which revealed that several factors have been identified militating against practicing nursing ethics in schools of nursing. These include time constraints and heavy workloads, limited opportunities for discussions and reflections on ethical issues, and a perceived lack of clear guidance from instructors on how to apply ethical principles in real-life situations. The findings of 20 also suggest that pressure to achieve high grades and a lack of positive role models for ethical behaviour among instructors and peers may also impact students' ability to practice nursing ethics effectively. The study of 21 also supports the findings suggesting that the presence of moral distress, influenced by factors such as witnessing neglect of patient rights and unethical behaviour by healthcare professionals, further contribute to challenges in upholding ethical standards.

Limitation of the Study

The limitation of the study was insufficient information from respondents as some were conservative. Therefore, information was not easily obtained.

Conclusion

This study has shed light on the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics among student nurses in Benin City, Edo State. The findings reveal that while there is a general recognition among student nurses of the importance of nursing ethics, there are variations in their perception and understanding of ethical principles. While some students perceive adequate coverage of nursing ethics topics in the curriculum, others identify gaps or limitations in the educational content. Additionally, factors such as time constraints, heavy workloads, and limited opportunities for discussions and reflections on ethical issues may impede the practice of nursing ethics in schools of nursing. Addressing these barriers and enhancing nursing ethics education within nursing schools are essential for promoting ethical practice and fostering the development of ethical competence among student nurses. This study underscores the importance of ongoing assessment and improvement efforts in nursing ethics education to ensure that student nurses are well-prepared to navigate ethical challenges and uphold ethical standards in their professional practice.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from Department of Nursing Science, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Benson Idahosa University, Benin City and taken to St. Philomena Catholic Hospital and Edo State College of Nursing Sciences both in Benin City, for permission to conduct the study. Data collection from nursing students commenced after the approval letter was submitted to the unit managers of both Colleges of Nursing Sciences. The purpose and nature of the study was explained to the participants and a written informed consent was obtained from all the respondents. Each participant was free to participate in the study and had the right to withdraw at any time. Also, participants were informed that obtained data was only to be used for the research purpose. Confidentiality and anonymity of the subjects was maintained by keeping nameless the questionnaire and by coding all data and keeping in a password protected computer.

Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interest.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made to improve the knowledge, attitude and practice of Nursing Ethics among nurses:

1. There should be a forum for all nurses at least once a month mortality review to identify and forestall possible legal and ethical issues.
2. The Department of Nursing Services and the management of all hospitals should collaborate to sponsor nurses to seminars, workshops and symposia.
3. There is a need to make provisions for current journals related to nursing practice to improve nurses' knowledge of nursing ethics and law.
4. The nurses should be fortified with modern equipment and enough manpower to enhance their productivity in the hospitals.
5. There should be good interpersonal relationship between nurses and patients, junior and senior nurses. This will strengthen the delivery of quality nursing care to patients and preclude good mentorship among nurses.

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