

## Awareness and Compliance about Professional Ethics As Perceived by Nursing Personnel and Patients

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### Abstract:

Professional ethics is an important aspect in health care system as professional ethics help in improving the quality of patient care and enhance job satisfaction among nurses and patients. The purpose of the study was to assess awareness and compliance about professional ethics as perceived by nursing personnel and patients. A descriptive design was utilized to meet the purpose of this study. Setting the study conducted at Medical and Surgical departments at Benha University Hospital. The sample of this study included 240 staff nurse, 60 head nurses and 80 patients. It was conducted at Benha University Hospital. Instruments: Two Instruments were used for data collection of this study namely (Nursing Professional Ethics Questionnaire and Professional Ethics Compliance Questionnaire). The results showed that nursing personnel had a moderate awareness level in relation to professional ethics; there was a statistical significant relation among nursing personnel awareness and their compliance regarding professional ethics. Patients had moderate awareness regarding nurse's compliance about professional ethics. This study concluded that head nurses total awareness and compliance was higher than staff nurses in relation to professional ethics. This study recommended that: In-service training and educational opportunities about professional nursing ethics should be provided for nurses.

**Keywords:** Awareness; Compliance; Professional ethics.

### Introduction:

Nursing profession is among the many professions which require a constant regulation of the ethics for nurses through the enforcement of codes of ethics. Nursing profession has a vital importance in terms of ensuring strict commitment to ethical professional standards. Ethical codes aim to ensure that nurses perform their duties and responsibilities in such a manner that could meet the highest ethical standards in their professional practice. This made patients satisfied with care given (Yeboah-asuama, 2015).

Development in nursing field require to apply ethics and is considered as new challenges in nursing, new challenges facing nurses that needs more attention is also placed. Ethics in nursing jobs are important but it is more necessary. Ethical behavior and responsibility with nurses has an important role in improving the patient's health (Mohamadi et al., 2016).

Nursing ethics provides the standards of professional behavior for nurses and the principles of knowledge right from a wrong conduct during the implementation of nursing duties and responsibilities. Ethical considerations are vital in any area dealing with human beings because they respect values, rights and relationships. Nurses are obligated to

provide ethical and legal client care that demonstrates respect for others (Hafez, Mohamed and Sobeh, 2016).

Ethics is an important part of nursing practice and an essential feature of good nursing. To practice ethically nurses need ethical awareness and confidence to decide what is right and what is wrong, help nurses to know the right thing to do, practicing ethically needs and prepared them to put this into action. Ethical questions that face nurses in their daily work range from the clinical issues concerned with patients to specific disease and treatment related decisions (Holt and Convey, 2012).

Due to the importance of ethics in the nursing profession, ethics is an analytical activity in which thoughts, ideas, commitments, attitudes, feelings, arguments and discussions on various aspects of ethical decision making in the nursing profession are studied carefully and critically and the necessary instructions are provided (Bazrafcan, Nabeiei, Shokrpour, Moadab, 2015). Ethical issues in nursing are becoming more varied and complex with medical advances and the increased complexity of the health care system, and these changes have critically impacted nursing. When nurses are frequently challenged by ethical issues in their daily

nursing practice .they must make decisions, they are likely to be distressed by these situations. Sometimes, such issues can result in negative impacts on nursing practice such as increasing burnout, decreasing job satisfaction or a threat to the quality of patient care and results in patient dissatisfaction (Park , Hee , Hong and Cho,2014).

An ethical issue can occur in any health care situation where profound moral questions are raised of what right or wrong underlies professional decision-making and the beneficent care of patients. All members of the health care team including nurses can be affected by ethical decisions as they address the stressful, ethical conflict and sometimes exhausting nature of working through ethical issues (Zakaria, Sleem and Seada, 2016).

Compliance to professional ethics by nursing team is one of the most critical aspects of quality health service delivery as it involves the way nurses interact with patients. This interaction affects the way patients receive and access health care services. Today, there have been increases in reported cases of non-compliance to professional ethics among nursing personnel at health care facilities. Un-ethical behaviors among nursing personnel hinder the accessibility of quality health services for patients as it effect on the relationship between nurses and patients. Once there is a good relationship between the two sides, patients will be satisfied with the services given to them. Non -compliance to professional ethics by nurses not only affect the quality of services that patients receive but also affects the reputation of nurses in the hospital (Kiria, 2012).

Awareness of the ethics and patients' rights and observing them accomplishes more satisfaction of the patient, nurses and other health care team will lead to the spread of good ethics and values among patients and health care team so the moral status of the patients and health care team will be upgraded but otherwise provided not observing these rights, it would lead to mistrust to health care team (Nejad, Begjani, Abotalebi and Salari, 2011).

#### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the study was to assess awareness and compliance about professional ethics as perceived by nursing personnel and patients.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What is the nurse's awareness about professional ethics among nursing personnel at Benha University Hospital?

2. To what extent nurses are complying with professional ethics according to nursing personnel and patients perception?
3. Is there a relationship between awareness and compliance with professional ethics among nursing personnel at Benha University Hospital?

#### **Methods:**

**Design:** Descriptive research study was utilized to conduct this study.

**Setting:** This study was conducted at medical and surgical departments at Benha University Hospital.

**Sampling:** A convenience sample was taken from the above mentioned departments at Benha University hospitals. It included all the staff nurses and head nurses available at time of the study. They have all fulfilled the eligibility criterion of working experience that had not less than one year experience in their work setting.

#### **Instruments:**

The data for this study was collected by using two tools namely:

##### **1. First instrument: Nursing Professional**

**Ethics Questionnaire:** It was developed by the researcher after reviewing the related literature (*American College of Health Care Executives ACHE, 2016*): It aimed to assess awareness about professional ethics among nursing personnel. It contained two parts:-

**Part I:** Personal characteristics of staff nurses and head nurses such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualification and years of experience.

##### **Part II:**

- A) Staff nurses : It included 49 items for head nurses, These items contained four categories which were leadership 15 items, relationship 23 items, patients privacy and confidentiality 3 items and ethical practices in the everyday workplace 8 items( $r = 0.36$  and  $\alpha = 0.80$  respectively).

B) Head nurses: It included 53 items for head nurses, These items contained five categories which were leadership 15 items, communication 4 items , relationship 23 items, patients privacy and confidentiality 3 items and ethical practices in the everyday workplace 8 items( $r = 0.29$  and  $\alpha = 0.90$  respectively).

**2. Second instrument: Professional Ethics Compliance questionnaire:** It was developed by the researcher after reviewing the related literature (Said, 2010 and Pearlman, Bottrell, Altemose, Foglia & Fox ,2013): It was developed to assess compliance of nurses with. Professional ethics as perceived by nursing personnel and patients. A - It included 29 items for nursing personnel, these items divided into three category which are privacy and confidentiality compliance 20 items, compliance and professional ethics integrity 5 items and shared ethical decision making with patients 4 items (For head nurses  $r = 0.29$  and  $\alpha = 0.89$  respectively, Staff nurses were  $r = 0.36$  and  $\alpha = 0.83$  respectively).

B - It included (34) items for patients to assess nurses compliance about professional ethics from their perspective ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ).

#### **Preparatory phase**

Validity of the study tools were tested by panel of Experts consisted of (5) Professors and Assistant Professors in the field of nursing one Assistant Professor of Nursing Administration at Faculty of Nursing Menoufia University, two Assistant Professors of Nursing Administration at Faculty of Nursing Tanta University, one Professor of Nursing Administration at Faculty of Nursing Tanta University, and one Assistant Professor of Community Health Nursing at Faculty of Nursing Benha University.

#### **Procedure:**

- An official permission was issued from Dean of the Faculty of Nursing to the Director of Benha University Hospital to obtain the approval for data collection, the objectives and the nature of the study were explained and then it was possible to carry out the study with minimum resistance.
- Each nurse, head nurses and patients were interviewed after explaining the purpose of the study and getting agreement of staff nurses, head nurses and patients to participate in the research.
- Data was collected at Benha University Hospital. Collection of data lasts for three months at Benha University Hospital from beginning of July 2017 to the end of September 2017. The researcher interviewed the study sample for three days /week. The time needed to complete each questionnaire sheet (15:20) minutes. The appropriate time of data collection was according to type of work and workload of each department, sometimes it was in the middle of the shift and other time before the end of the shift.

#### **Pilot study**

Pilot study was conducted to assess tool clarity and applicability. It had also served in estimating the time needed for filling the form .The study was tested on 10 % of total subjects, it was done on (26 staff nurses, 6 head nurses and 8 patients) were excluded from the main subjects. The necessary clarification for some statements related to their translation to Arabic was done and the tool not modified, the final form was developed and made ready for use.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

The studies were conducted with careful attention to ethical standards of research and rights of the participants:

- **Informed consent**

The respondent rights were protected by ensuring voluntary participation, so the informed consent was obtained by explaining

purpose, nature time of conducting the study, potential benefits of the study, how data would be collected, any invasive procedure, expected outcomes and the respondent rights to withdrawing from the research study at any time in case of violation of his rights.

▪ **Anonymity and confidentiality**

The respondents were assured that the data was treated as strictly confidential; furthermore, the respondent anonymity would be maintained as they would not require mentioning their names.

**III. Administrative design**

An official permission for data collection was granted from hospitals directors explaining the aim of the study of Benha University Hospital in Benha City.

**IV. Statistical design**

After completion of data collection, computerized data entry and statistical analysis were fulfilling scored using Statistical Package for social science (SPSS). (Version twenty)

Data are summarizing using:

- Arithmetic mean: As average describing the central tendency of observation.
- The standard deviation: As a measure of dispersion of results around the mean (for quantitative variable).

The observed difference associated was considered as following:

Qualitative were compared using chi square test ( $\chi^2$ ) as the test of significance. The p-value is the degree is significant. Tests of significance were used to compare study groups using the t-test. The p-value is the probability that an observed difference is due to chance and not a true difference. A significance level value was considered when  $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$  and a highly significance level was considered when  $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ , while  $p\text{-value} > 0.05$  indicates non-significance results.

**Results**

**Table (1):** Illustrates distribution of nursing personnel regarding their personal characteristics at Benha University Hospital. This table clarified that the head nurses and staff nurses, more than half their age between 20-29 years (58.3% and 59.6%) in the study setting respectively. The majority of the two samples were females, According to marital status the majority of two samples were married (73.3 % and 81.3%) respectively. As for their educational qualification for head nurses sample

were bachelor degree of nursing more than two third (73.3%), while staff nurses were diploma degree in nursing more than half(60.4%). Regarding to years of experience the majority (45% and 42.9%) among head nurses and staff nurses respectively between 1-5 years.

**Table (2):** Shows the mean score of total awareness about professional ethical items among the nursing personnel in the study setting. This table illustrated that there was non-statistical significant difference between studied nursing personnel in the study setting. The head nurses had a higher mean score of total awareness of professional ethics items than staff nurses ( $22.8 \pm 3.74$  and  $21.90 \pm 4.40$ ) respectively.

**Table(3):** Shows the mean score of total compliance among studied nursing personnel in the study setting. This table illustrated that there was a non-statistical significant difference in relation to the mean score of total compliance with professional ethics items of the studied nursing personnel. The head nurses had a higher mean score than staff nurses in the study setting. **Table(4):** Illustrates the correlation between total awareness and total compliance score among studied nursing personnel in the study setting. This table illustrated that there was statistical significant difference among nursing personnel.

**Table(5):** Shows the distribution of studied patients regarding their personal characteristics at Benha University Hospital. As for age the majority of the sample (41.3%) their age were between (35-44 years ) and more than 45-50 years. As for gender the majority of the patients (63.3%) were females and while (87.5%) were married. According to educational qualification the majority of the sample (40%) had intermediate education.

**Figure(1):** Shows the level of nursing personnel awareness regarding to total professional ethics score in the study setting. It illustrated that there were a moderate level of awareness among nursing personnel (63.3%-67.1%) respectively.

**Figure(2):** Shows the level of nursing personnel compliance regarding to total professional ethics score in the study setting. It illustrated that there were a moderate level of compliance among nursing personnel (63.3%-67.1%) respectively

**Figure(3):** Level of the studied patients perception regarding to nurses compliance with professional ethics in the study setting, the moderate perception level of studied patients regarding to nurses compliance with professional ethics was high (47.5%).

**Table(1): Distribution of Nursing Personnel Regarding to their personal characteristics at Benha University Hospital (No=300).**

Personal characteristics	Head nurse (N=60)		Staff nurse (N=240)	
	No	%	No	%
<b>Age</b>				
20-29	35	58.3	143	59.6
30-39	14	23.3	71	29.6
≥40	11	18.3	26	10.8
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	11	18.3	43	17.9
Female	49	81.7	197	82.1
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	16	26.7	45	18.8
Married	44	73.3	195	81.3
<b>Educational qualification</b>				
Master degree in nursing	7	11.7	0	0.0
Bachelor degree in nursing	44	73.3	0	0.0
Diploma degree in nursing	7	11.7	145	60.4
Associated degree in nursing	2	3.3	95	39.6
<b>Years of experience</b>				
1-5	27	45.0	103	42.9
6-10	15	25.0	60	25.0
11-20	9	15.0	58	24.2
≥21	9	15.0	19	7.9

**Table(2): Mean score of total awareness about professional ethical items among the nursing personnel in the study setting(No=300).**

Ethical items	Min score	Max score	Head nurses	Staff nurses	t- test	p-value
			$\bar{x} \pm SD$	$\bar{x} \pm SD$		
Leadership	15	32	22.8±3.74	21.90±4.40	1.61	0.90
Relationship	6	14	8.41±2.05	8.12±1.79	1.07	0.28
Board	5	13	8.45±1.89	7.71±2.04	2.66	0.74
Work collages	7	21	10.20±2.44	10.57±1.80	1.34	0.37
Clinics	4	8	6.42±1.41	5.70±1.26	3.61	0.72
Patient privacy	3	8	5.11±1.30	5.22±1.03	0.71	0.11
Ethical practice	8	19	13.43±2.92	12.38±2.81	2.50	0.05
Communication	4	9	6.00±1.44	0		

**Table(3): Mean score of studied nursing personnel regarding total compliance in the study setting(No=300).**

Total	Min	Max	Head nurses	Staff nurses	t-test	p-value
			$\bar{x} \pm SD$	$\bar{x} \pm SD$		
- Privacy and confidentiality	26	60	34.7±6.8	42.7±6.05	1.17	0.24
- Compliance and professional ethics integrity	5	15	10.9±2.8	10.5±2.5	1.05	0.29
- Shared ethical decisions with patients	4	12	8.6±2.4	8.45±2.2	0.5	0.61

\*Independent t test

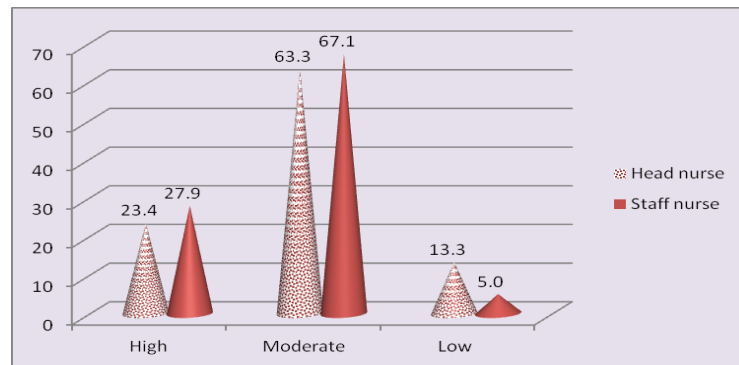
Table (4): Correlation between total awareness score and total compliance score among nursing personnel (N=300) .

Total compliance	Total awareness			
	Head nurses		Staff nurses	
	r	p-value	r	p-value
	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>0.04</b>

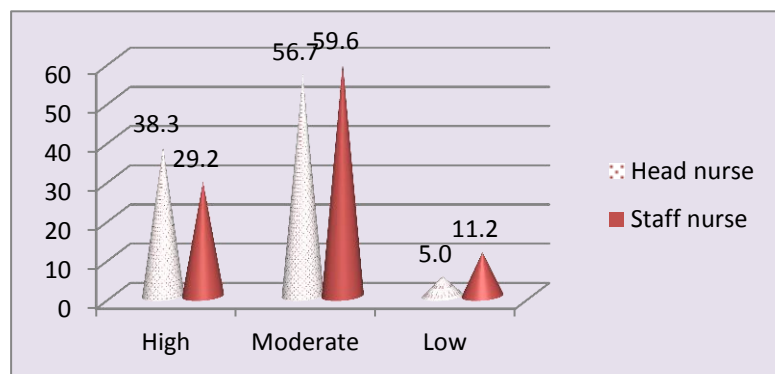
Table(5): Distribution of studied patients regarding their personal characteristics at Benha University Hospital (No=80).

Personal characteristics among patients(N=80)		
	No	%
Age		
20-29	7	8.8
30-39	7	8.8
40-44	33	41.3
≥ 45	33	41.3
$\bar{x} \pm SD$ 39.2±6.5		
Gender		
Male	29	36.3
Female	51	63.8
Marital status		
Single	10	12.5
Married	70	87.5
Educational qualifications		
Illiterate	14	17.5
Reads and writes	18	22.5
Intermediate education	32	40.0
Education above average	11	13.8
Bachelors degree	5	6.3

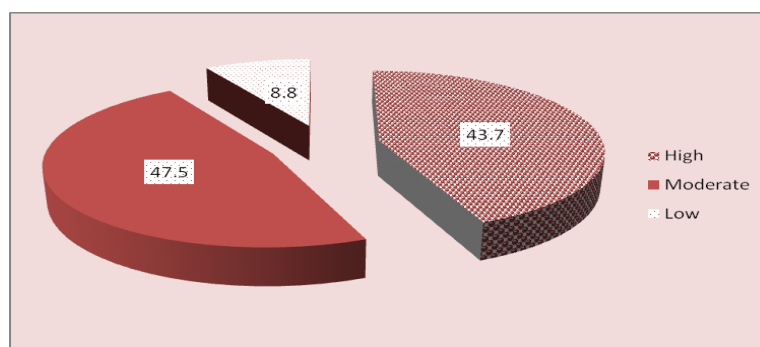
**Figure(1):** Level of nursing personnel awareness regarding to total professional ethics score in the study setting.



**Figure(2):** Level of studied nursing personnel compliance regarding to total professional ethics score in the study setting.



**Figure(3):** Level of the studied patients perception regarding to nurses compliance with professional ethics in the study setting.



## Discussion

Health care delivery in recent times has become more complicated as patients expect health personnel to not only provide professional services but be accountable as well. It is thus imperative that health personnel are aware of their responsibility to the patient and also sensitive to medico -legal issues if quality health care is to be assured (Barnie, Forson, Opere-Addo, Appiah-Poku and Rhule,2015).

The present study showed that head nurses had a higher mean score of total awareness of professional ethics than staff nurses. The findings disagree with Hariharan , Jonnalagadda, Walrond and Moseley,(2006) who conducted study about knowledge, attitudes and practice of health care ethics and law among doctors and nurses in Barbados". Illustrated that only 34% of

nurses did not have awareness regarding ethics. This could be related to different setting.

The present study showed that head nurses had a higher mean score than staff nurses in relation to compliance with professional ethics in the study setting. This finding disagrees with Rezaei et al., (2006) whose study showed that in the emergency departments of a total of ten hospitals in Lorestan (province of Western Iran) which were assessed for their compliance with professional ethics standards and patients' rights, nurses not fully complying with professional ethics. The fact here is that it is not enough to train nurses and other health care providers to achieve desired outcomes, following relevant feedbacks in the system is important as well. From my perspective nursing personnel compliance was higher than their awareness at Benha University Hospitals due to ethical consideration that reflects the actual Egyptian culture which depends mainly on religious values, customs and beliefs.

The present study revealed that there was statistical significant difference among nursing personnel in relation to the correlation between total awareness and total compliance score among studied nursing personnel in the study setting. The findings agreed with Hassan, El - Karmalawy and Abdel-Sabour, (2012) who conducted a study called assessment of professional ethics practiced by nurses working in primary health care centers in port said showed that, there was a moderate positive statistically significant correlation between nurses' knowledge and practice related to total professional ethics.

The present study revealed that there was a highly statistical significant differences regarding nursing personnel compliance with professional ethics as perceived by studied patients, the highest percent reported that nurses and physician respect each other, nurses provided suitable required health education for patients before hospitalization until before discharge. Also two third of patients reported that they were treated fairly and nurse provided more time to them when they needed more health care and nurses received them upon their entry to the section. While the minority of patients reported that nurses immediately implemented their desire to leave the hospital even before completing treatment.

This findings disagreed with Bollig, Schmidt, Rosland and Heller, (2015) who conducted study about ethical challenges in nursing homes—staff opinions and experiences with a systematic ethics meeting with participation of residents relatives they revealed that 40% of nursing home residents reported

being told nothing about their medical condition at all.

## **Conclusion**

- The present study showed that head nurses were more aware than staff nurses about professional ethics at Benha University hospital.
- According to nurses perception, head nurses had a higher compliance with professional ethics than staff nurses
- According to patients perception had moderate awareness level regarding nurses compliance about professional ethics.
- There was a highly statistical significant positive correlation between nurses' awareness and compliance about professional ethics.

## **Recommendations**

1. Creating awareness regarding professional ethics, ethical principles, ethical guidelines and standards of nursing practice in clinical areas.
2. Building a positive relationship between nurses and their patients and between head nurses and their staff. This will strengthen the delivery of quality nursing care to patients.
3. Staff nurses should be represented in the hospital meetings, sharing and participating in decision- making about patient's problem.
4. In-service training and educational opportunities about professional nursing ethics should be conducted.
5. Developing system for patient's complaints as follow up and management.
6. Implement performance evaluation system to evaluate the nursing personnel regarding their ethical behavior and its application through following specific evaluation sheet.
7. Further researches are recommended to be done in the future to:
  - A. Determine the barriers for health care giver application of professional ethics.
  - B. Identify the effect of nursing ethics program on nurses' awareness about patient rights.

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