

## Determination of nurses' attitudes toward ethical principles in the clinical environment

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### Abstract

This research was carried out as a descriptive study to determine the attitudes of nurses toward ethical principles in the clinical setting. The research was carried out between 08/04/2023 and 14/04/2023 with the participation of 203 nurses working in a university hospital. The data were collected using a 22-question introductory information form prepared by the researcher in line with the literature and the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale. The conformity of the data to normal distribution was evaluated by Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov Smirnov tests. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, median (min-max), Kruskal Wallis test, and Mann-Whitney U test were used to analyze the data. In line with the findings obtained from this study, nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles were determined at a high level. It is recommended that nurses' awareness of the importance of ethical principles in the clinical environment should be increased in their professional education and postgraduation continuing education programs.

**Keywords:** Clinical environment; ethics; ethical principles; nurse.

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## 1. Introduction

Ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos" and is used synonymously with the words morality and moral. Ethics is defined as norms, ideals, principles, standards, or moral requirements that regulate the behavior of a person or profession, guide what should or should not be done, often do not contain written and precise conditions, allow judging human behavior, and may change depending on time, changing conditions, social needs and scientific developments [1-3].

Nurses, who are an important component of healthcare service delivery, may face many ethical problems because they are the healthcare team members who interact with patients and their families the most. Nurses need ethical principles to guide them in solving the ethical problems they face [4-6]. Ethical principles in nursing have been developed to raise awareness among nurses about the moral side of their profession, to be morally sensitive, and to ensure that they develop a professional attitude towards individuals in need of nursing care, society, and the profession [1,7].

Basic ethical principles in nursing practices; The principle of beneficence-no harm generally includes items such as protecting and valuing human life, not harming due to indifference, inexperience, and negligence, knowing the risks and taking precautions, not harming the individual due to medical practices, clinical research and ensuring patient safety [8-10] [2]. The principle of autonomy is to include individuals in the decision-making process and respect their decisions [2, 9,11,12]. The principle of *justice* includes rights and equality. The principle of *honesty* is the sharing of true and accurate information about the patient. The principle of *confidentiality-reliability-privacy* emphasizes that trust between the patient and the nurse has a very positive effect on the effectiveness of patient care. For this reason, a professional nurse has the responsibility to protect the privacy of the individual she/he serves in physical, mental, and social aspects [2,8,13].

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

Within the scope of this study, nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles will be determined and appropriate strategies and recommendations will be developed in line with the findings obtained. In this study, which was conducted to determine the attitudes of nurses toward ethical principles in the clinical environment, the following questions were sought to be answered.

- What are the socio-demographic and working features of nurses?
- What is the level of nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles in the clinical environment?

## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. Place and time of the research

This descriptive study was conducted between 08.04.2023 and 14.04.2023 with the participation of 203 nurses working in a university hospital who agreed to participate in the study.

### 2.2. Participants

Volunteer nurses who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study. No sampling method was used in the study. It was aimed to include all nurses who met the research criteria between the specified dates. In line with previous studies on this subject, it was seen that it was sufficient to include at least 163 nurses in the sample with a 90% confidence limit and 5% error out of 406 nurses working in a university hospital.

### 2.3. Data collection tools

In this study, data were collected using the "Nurses' Identification Information Form" and "Ethical Principles Attitude Scale". The nurses' diagnostic information form consists of 22 questions that determine the socio-demographic and working-life characteristics of nurses. The questionnaire form was pre-tested in a group of 10 people and the nurses who participated in the pilot study were not included in the sample. Before starting the study, ethics committee permission was obtained from

the Human Research Ethics Committee. After the nurses participating in the study were informed about the study and their informed consent was obtained, the data were collected by the researchers.

### 2.3.1. Ethical Principles Attitude Scale

The Ethical Principles Attitude Scale is a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=indecisive, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree) consisting of 35 articles developed by Kasap and Bahçecik [1]. The scale consists of 6 sub-dimensions: Justice (Articles 10, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33), Endamaging (Articles 2, 3, 4, 5), Honesty (Articles 11, 12, 28, 29, 30, 35), Respect to Autonomy (Articles 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 34), Getting Benefit (Articles 1, 14, 15, 16, 17) and Privacy-Secretion (Articles 6, 7, 8, 9). Articles 9, 11, 28, and 35 are reverse-scored. The score that can be obtained from the scale varies between 35 and 175. A score close to 35 indicates that the attitude towards ethical principles in nurses is high, while a score close to 175 indicates that it is low. Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.88 in total and between 0.63 and 0.77 in sub-dimensions. In this study, while the Cronbach's alpha value of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale was determined as 0.87, the Cronbach's alpha values of Justice, Endamaging, Honesty, Respect to Autonomy, Getting Benefit and Privacy-Secretion sub-dimensions were 0.84, 0.82, 0.45, 0.67, 0.74 and 0.54, respectively.

### 2.4. Data collection and ethics

It was explained to the nurses that the decision about whether to participate in the study was entirely their own and that the data to be collected from this study would be used only within the scope of the research. To collect the data, ethics committee permission was obtained from the institution and informed consent was obtained from the nurses included in the study. The data collection period lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

### 2.5. Data analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using the IBM SPSS 25 package program. The normality test of quantitative data was examined with Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov Smirnov. Kruskal Wallis test and Mann Whitney U test were used to analyze the data. The reliability of the scales used was analyzed with Cronbach Alpha. Quantitative data were presented as median (minimum-maximum) and qualitative data were presented as frequency (percentage). The significance level was taken as  $p < 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

Of the nurses who participated in the study, 69% were female, 31% were male, 70% were married, 67% were married, 67% had a bachelor's degree, 92.1% had a nuclear family structure, 89.7% worked as ward nurses, 72.4% worked in shifts, 70.9% willingly chose the service they worked in, 52.2% were satisfied with the service they worked in, 58.1% willingly chose the nursing profession, 57.6% liked their profession, 86.2% received ethics-related education during their vocational education, 55.2% received ethics-related education after graduation, 96.1% felt that ethics education was necessary for nursing education, 83.3% found their behaviors by ethical principles, and 59.1% defined the concept of ethics as "ethics is professional ethics". The mean age of the nurses was  $33.2 \pm 6.8$  years, the mean number of years of employment was  $11.3 \pm 6.9$ , the mean number of weekly working hours was  $47.7 \pm 9.5$ , the mean number of patients cared for per day was  $13.3 \pm 21.6$ , and the mean number of total nurses working in the ward was  $15.5 \pm 11.4$  (Table I).

TABLE I  
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSES' SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORKING LIFE FEATURES (N=203)

Features		n	%
<b>Age groups</b> <b>(33.2 ± 6.8)</b>	20-29 years old	71	35.0
	30-39 years old	96	47.3
	40 years and older	36	17.7
<b>Gender</b>	Female	140	69.0
	Male	63	31.0

<b>Marital status</b>	Married	142	70.0
	Single	61	30.0
<b>Education status</b>	Health Vocational High School	4	2.0
	Associate Degree	31	15.3
	Bachelor's degree	136	67.0
	Master's degree	24	11.8
	PhD degree	8	3.9
<b>Family type</b>	Extended family	16	7.9
	Nuclear family	187	92.1
<b>Income status</b>	Income less than expenditure	28	13.8
	Income equal to expenditure	131	64.5
	Income more than expenditure	44	21.7
<b>Role in the service</b>	Service nurse	182	89.7
	Nurse in charge	21	10.3
<b>Mode of operation</b>	Continuous daytime	56	27.6
	Shift	147	72.4
<b>Year of operation (11.3 ± 6.9)</b>	1-5 years	44	21.7
	6-10 years	65	32.0
	11-15 years	58	28.6
	16 years and above	36	17.7
<b>Status of willingly choosing the service they work in</b>	Yes	144	70.9
	No	59	29.1
<b>Satisfaction with the service they work in</b>	I am satisfied	106	52.2
	Partially satisfied	85	41.9
	Not satisfied	12	5.9
<b>Status of choosing the profession voluntarily</b>	Yes	118	58.1
	No	85	41.9
<b>Liking the profession</b>	I love	117	57.6
	I don't like	34	16.7
	Indecisive	52	25.6
<b>Receiving training on ethics during vocational education</b>	Yes	175	86.2
	No	28	13.8
<b>Receiving ethics-related training after graduation</b>	Yes	112	55.2
	No	91	44.8
<b>The necessity of ethical education in nursing education</b>	Yes	195	96.1
	No.	8	3.9
<b>Finding their behavior by ethical principles</b>	Yes	169	83.3
	No	4	2.0
	Sometimes	30	14.8
<b>The expression that best defines the concept of ethics</b>	Ethics is philosophy.	6	3.0
	Ethics is morality.	56	27.6
	Ethics is professional ethics.	120	59.1
	Ethics is a set of rules.	8	3.9
	Ethics is a criterion of good and evil.	13	6.4

In this study, the mean Ethical Principles Attitude Scale score of the nurses was  $68.8 \pm 12.3$  and the median score value was 67 (46-108). The mean scores of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale Justice, Endamaging, Honesty, Respect to Autonomy, Getting Benefit and Privacy-Secretion subscales were  $12.5 \pm 3.8$ ,  $7.8 \pm 2.9$ ,  $17.0 \pm 2.2$ ,  $16.4 \pm 3.6$ ,  $8.6 \pm 2.4$  and  $6.6 \pm 2.8$ , and the median values were 12 (8-25), 8 (4-19), 17 (12-24), 17 (9-29), 9 (5-16) and 6 (4-17) (Table II).

TABLE II  
MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND MEDIAN SCORE VALUES OF THE TOTAL SCORE AND  
SUBSCALE SCORES OF THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES ATTITUDE SCALE

Ethical Principles Attitude Scale	Mean ± SD	Median (Min-Max)
Justice	12.5 ± 3.8	12 (8-25)
Endamaging	7.8 ± 2.9	8 (4-19)
Honesty	17.0 ± 2.2	17 (12-24)
Respect to Autonomy	16.4 ± 3.6	17 (9-29)
Getting Benefit	8.6 ± 2.4	9 (5-16)
Privacy-Secretion	6.6 ± 2.8	6 (4-17)
<b>Total</b>	<b>68.8 ± 12.3</b>	<b>67 (46-108)</b>

Min: Minimum. Max: Maximum. S.S: Standard Deviation

The socio-demographic and working life characteristics of the nurses and the total score values of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale were compared in Table 3. In line with the findings obtained, it was determined that the total score values of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale differed according to the educational status of the nurses ( $p=0.003$ ), years of employment ( $p=0.004$ ), the status of receiving training on ethics during vocational training ( $p=0.007$ ) and the status of finding their behaviors by ethical principles ( $p<0.001$ ) (Table III).

TABLE III  
COMPARISON OF THE TOTAL SCORE VALUES OF THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES ATTITUDE SCALE WITH  
THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORKING LIFE CHARACTERISTICS OF NURSES

Features		Median (Min-Max)	Test value p
Age groups	20-29 years old	68 (53-108)	$\chi^2=2.747$ $p=0.253$
	30-39 years old	66 (46-104)	
	40 years and older	70 (47-92)	
Gender	Female	67 (46-95)	U=3808.0 $p=0.120$
	Male	68 (51-108)	
Marital status	Married	69 (46-108)	U=3620.0 $p=0.064$
	Single	65 (47-95)	
Education status	Health Vocational High School	78 (73-83) A	$\chi^2=15.669$ <b><math>p=0.003</math></b>
	Associate Degree	73 (57-108) A	
	Bachelor's degree	67 (46-104) AB	
	Master's degree	65.5 (47-90) AB	
	PhD degree	61 (51-70) B	
Family type	Extended family	63 (53-92)	U=1287.0 $p=0.354$
	Nuclear family	68 (46-108)	
Income status	Income less than expenditure	71.5 (51-108)	$\chi^2=2.468$ $p=0.291$
	Income equal to expenditure	67 (47-104)	
	Income more than expenditure	68.5 (46-93)	
Role in the service	Service nurse	67 (46-108)	U=1808.0 $p=0.686$
	Nurse in charge	70 (47-92)	

<b>Mode of operation</b>	Continuous daytime Shift	68.5 (46-92) 67 (51-108)	U=3759.0 p=0.340
<b>Year of operation</b>	1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16 years and above	70 (58-95) A 67 (51-108) AB 65 (46-82) B 71 (47-92) A	$\chi^2=13.315$ <b>p=0.004</b>
<b>Voluntary choice of the service they work in</b>	Yes No	68 (47-108) 66 (46-104)	U=4215.0 p=0.931
<b>Satisfaction with the service they work in</b>	I am satisfied Partially satisfied Not satisfied	68 (47-108) 67 (46-104) 64 (57-78)	$\chi^2=0.586$ p=0.746
<b>Status of choosing the profession voluntarily</b>	Yes No	70 (47-108) 67 (46-104)	U=4816.0 p=0.630
<b>Liking the profession</b>	I love I don't like Undecided	68 (47-108) 67 (53-104) 66 (46-93)	$\chi^2=0.986$ p=0.611
<b>Receiving training on ethics during vocational education</b>	Yes No	67 (46-108) 74 (55-95)	U=1672.0 <b>p=0.007</b>
<b>Receiving ethics-related training after graduation</b>	Yes No	67 (46-108) 70 (51-95)	U=4913.0 p=0.660
<b>The necessity of ethical education in nursing education</b>	Yes No	67 (46-108) 81 (52-95)	U=559.0 p=0.174
<b>Finding their behavior by ethical principles</b>	Yes No Sometimes	66 (46-108) A 82.5 (73-92) B 75 (64-95) B	$\chi^2=17.166$ <b>p&lt;0.001</b>
<b>The expression that best defines the concept of ethics</b>	Ethics is philosophy. Ethics is morality. Ethics is professional ethics. Ethics is a set of rules. Ethics is a criterion of good and evil.	95 (59-108) 68 (56-93) 67 (47-104) 70.5 (62-81) 71 (46-92)	$\chi^2=5.620$ p=0.229

$\chi^2$ : Kruskal Wallis Test Statistic, U: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistic, A-B: There is no difference between groups with the same letter.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study, which was conducted to determine the attitudes of nurses working in a university hospital located in the Central Black Sea Region in northern Turkey towards ethical principles in the clinical environment, were discussed in line with the relevant literature.

In this study, it was determined that the total score of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale of nurses differed according to the educational status of the nurses, and the attitudes of nurses with master's and doctoral degrees towards ethical principles were high. In the study conducted by Savcı and Karaaslan [14], the ethical attitudes of nurses with bachelor's and postgraduate degrees were found to be high. The increase in attitudes towards ethical principles as the level of education increases is expected and considered a positive situation.

In line with the findings obtained from this study, it was determined that the total score of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale of the nurses differed according to the working years of the nurses, and the attitudes of the nurses with 16 years and more working years towards ethical principles were higher. In other studies, conducted by the research findings, it was reported that the ethical attitudes

of nurses increased as their working years increased [1, 14, 15]. It can be said that as the duration of clinical experience of nurses increases, the level of ethical behavior, critical thinking, and knowledge of ethical rules also increases [16].

In this study, it was determined that the total score of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale of the nurses differed according to the nurses' receiving ethics-related training during their professional education and finding their behaviors by ethical principles; those who did not receive ethics-related training during their professional education and those who did not find their behaviors by ethical principles had higher attitudes towards ethical principles. In line with the findings of the study, Kahriman and Çalık [15] found that the ethical attitudes of nurses who did not receive ethics-related training were high. It is thought that this situation may be because the content of the training received by the nurses who reported that they received training on ethics consisted of theoretical subjects containing general information and did not include enough practices related to ethical problems and solutions [15].

It was determined that the total score of the Ethical Principles Attitude Scale of the nurses participating in the study did not differ according to the nurses' age, gender, marital status, family type, income status, position in the service, working style, willingly choosing the service where they work, being satisfied with the service where they work, willingly choosing their profession, liking their profession, receiving ethics-related education after graduation and the necessity of ethics education in nursing education. In some studies that support the findings of the research, it has been reported that there is no statistically significant difference between the ethical attitude levels of nurses and age [15, 17], gender [1,9,14,17,18], marital status [15,17], and the status of receiving ethics-related training after graduation [19,20].

When the literature on this topic is examined, ethical attitude levels of nurses and age [9,14], gender [15], position in the service [1,21], working style [1,21], willingly choosing the profession, liking the profession [14] and receiving ethics-related training after graduation [22], as well as studies reporting that there is no statistically significant difference between the educational status of nurses [9,23], working years [17] and receiving ethics-related training during vocational training [17,24], and ethical attitude levels can be seen.

## 5. Conclusion

Although nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles differ, this may be due to differences in nurses' personality and work environment characteristics and their ability to cope with the problems they face. In conclusion, it is thought that it is extremely important to develop strategies to improve nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles to increase the quality of nursing care and improve patient care outcomes.

In this study, it was determined that nurses' attitudes towards ethical principles in the clinical environment were high. In line with the findings obtained from this study, it is recommended that interactive methods should be used in the courses related to ethics in nursing vocational education, ethical dimensions of the subjects addressed during applied courses should be addressed, cases should be analyzed in terms of compliance with ethical principles, and ethics and ethical principles should be included in post-graduation continuing education programs.

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