

**Original article**

**A Study of Nurses' Perception of Professional Values in the University Hospitals Affiliated with Jahrom University of Medical Sciences, 2015**

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**Abstract**

**Objectives:** In order to deal with professional ethical issues successfully, nurses and other providers of clinical care need to rely on professional values that are meant to guide their professional decision-making, actions and behaviors. These values form the basis of nursing. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate nurses' perception of professional values in the hospitals affiliated with Jahrom University of Medical Sciences. **Method:** In this descriptive-analytical study, 100 nurses employed at the university hospitals of Jahrom were selected through simple convenience sampling. To examine the subjects' perception of professional values, the researchers used a two-part questionnaire: part one consisted of questions about the personal and social characteristics of the subjects; part two was the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised. The latter consists of 26 items based on American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses and addresses the following areas: caring (9 items), activism (5 items), trust (5 items), professionalism (4 items) and justice (3 items). Answers are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale: the answer choices "Not important" and "Very important" are assigned 1 point and 5 points respectively. The score range is between 26 and 130—higher scores indicate the respondent's greater familiarity with professional values. **Findings:** The participants of the study consisted of 99 nurses who were selected from the various parts of the university hospitals of Jahrom. The participants' mean scores for caring, activism, trust, professionalism, justice and total perception of professional values were found to be 32.15, 15.47, 17.37, 13.32, 10.66 and 88.98 respectively. The results of the study showed that there was not a significant relationship between the age, gender and marital status of nurses on one hand and their professional values scores on the other (P=0.7). **Conclusion:** There is need for effective programs to enhance nurses' awareness of certain of their professional duties and improve their professional performance in a wide range of professional areas alongside their duties as care-givers.

**Keywords:** professional values; perception; nurses.

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**Introduction**

Values are defined as beliefs and goals which form behaviors and are at the basis of decision-making and action<sup>1</sup>. An individual develops personal values under the influence of his/her family, culture, society, environment, religion and ethnicity<sup>2</sup>. Acquisition of values is a gradual and evolutionary process that

continues throughout an individual's life<sup>3</sup>.

Defined as what helps the members of a profession decide what is good or acceptable, professional values are related to an individual's beliefs and are often rooted in his/her personal values<sup>2</sup>. Values constitute a primary part of the nursing profession<sup>4</sup>. An understanding of how to develop and impart

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professional values is an important matter to the future of nursing<sup>5</sup>. In order to deal with professional ethical issues successfully, nurses and other providers of clinical care need to rely on professional values that can guide their professional decision-making, actions and behaviors<sup>6</sup>. These values should lie at the basis of nurses' performance and determine the nature of their interactions with their patients, colleagues, other medical professionals and the public; they also ensure nurses' commitment to the welfare of their patients and provide nurses with a guide to ethical behaviors in order to provide humanitarian security and care<sup>7</sup>.

Technological advances and the expansion of nursing roles have often led to ethical and spiritual complications for nurses<sup>8</sup>. Variety in patients, economic difficulties and problems in the hospital environment can also contribute to the ethical complications nurses are faced with. Nurses should base their decision-making on accepted professional values when dealing with professional and ethical complications. At the core of professional values is: honesty and integrity, humanity, respect, sense of responsibility, compassion and sympathy, altruism, self-confidence, and self-improvement<sup>3</sup>.

Professional culture and education are among the factors that affect nursing values<sup>4</sup>. Attention to the global nursing culture is essential to the improvement of nurses' professional performance<sup>9</sup>. The impartment of professional nursing values is a gradual and long-lasting process which begins with the professional education of nurses and extends throughout all the years of a nurse's practice<sup>10</sup>.

Studies show that the majority of nurses find it challenging to act based on professional values and moral ideals in clinical environments<sup>11</sup>. Thus, it is necessary to incorporate professional values into educational programs for nurses to enable them to provide high-quality clinical care<sup>7</sup>. Yet, most of the current educational programs for nurses stress cognitive and mental-kinetic abilities and communication skills<sup>12</sup>. Consideration of ethical values is a behavior that varies from region to region (8). Not many studies have been conducted in Iran, or in Asian countries in general, to exclusively investigate the status of professional nursing values<sup>13</sup>. Since ethic codes represent professional values and inform experts about the extent to which their performance agrees with their values, one can conclude that professional ethics and professional values are closely connected; however, in the field of professional ethics, too, fewer studies have been

conducted in Iran compared to other countries<sup>11, 12</sup>.

The results of the study of Schank et al. show that education is essential to the development of professional values in nurses. However, most official education programs for nurses fail to pay attention to essential nursing values and, in general, these values are learned through casual discussions<sup>10</sup>.

In their study of the attitude of nursing students in type I medical schools in Iran toward professional values, Hosseini et al. (2012) report that, even though the mean of the students' total scores lie in the relatively important or important ranges of the Likert scale, the majority of the students who were about to graduate are not aware of the importance of certain of the value-related aspects of their non-clinical duties. Hosseini et al. conclude that in order to develop professional nursing values thoroughly, nursing students need effective education in this area<sup>14</sup>.

Attention to professional nursing values is necessary because nurses bring their ethical codes and values to clinical environments and base their decisions about medical treatments, interventions, healthcare, etc. on those values; moreover, as nurses participate in the process of socialization, their values are likely to change<sup>7</sup>. The present study aims to investigate the perspectives of nurses in the hospitals affiliated with Jahrom University of Medical Sciences on professional values.

**Study population:** The nurses who worked at the hospitals affiliated with Jahrom University of Medical Sciences formed the population of the study.

**Sampling:** Through simple random sampling, 100 nurses employed at the two university hospitals of Jahrom—Mottahari and Peymanieh—were selected for this descriptive-analytical study.

#### **Data collection instruments**

A two-part questionnaire was used to evaluate the subjects' perception of professional values: part one addressed the personal and social characteristics of the subjects and part two was the revised version of Nurses Professional Values Scale. The latter consists of 26 items based on American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses and addresses the following areas: caring (9 items), activism (5 items), trust (5 items), professionalism (4 items) and justice (3 items). Answers are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale: the answer choices "Not important" and "Very important" are assigned 1 point and 5 points respectively. The total score range is between 26 and 130—higher scores indicate the respondent's greater familiarity with professional values.

**Reliability and validity of the scale**

Designed by Schank and Weis, the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised is reported to have high validity and reliability. A five-member panel of experts on professional values have assessed the validity of the scale and reported its Cronbach's alpha to be 0.92<sup>16</sup>. In Iran, Hosseini et al. evaluated the validity and reliability of the scale in 2011: initially, the scale was translated into Farsi and then it was translated back into English; the face and content validity of the scale was confirmed by 7 professors at the Nursing School of Tabriz, and its reliability was verified based on the results of a pilot study of 72 nursing students which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92<sup>14</sup>.

**Intervention**

The present descriptive-analytical study was conducted on the nurses working at Mottahari and Peymanieh University Hospitals in Jahrom, Iran. After obtaining permission from the authorities at the university and the hospitals, the researchers visited the various wards of the hospitals—internal, surgery, intensive care, children's ward, etc.—and introduced themselves and the objectives of the study to the nurses. Subsequently, considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study, they asked the subjects to fill out the informed consent form. Next, the subjects were asked to complete the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised. The subjects were told that their names were not required and that their information would remain confidential.

**The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study**

The inclusion criteria were:

- being willing to participate in the study,
- having at least one year of work experience,
- having a bachelor's degree or above.

The exclusion criterion was having a second job.

**Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, etc.) were used to report the data, and t-test and chi-square were used to make comparisons.

**Results**

99 nurses from the various wards of the university hospitals of Jahrom participated in the present study. Table 1 shows the frequency of the subjects based on their demographic characteristics. Table 2 shows the subjects' mean scores for the various parts of the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised; as the table shows, the nurses' total professional values mean score is 88.98, which is relatively satisfactory. The results of the study also show that there is not a significant relationship between the age, gender and

marital status of nurses and their professional values scores (P=0.7).

**Table 1.** Frequency of the subjects' demographic variables

Variables		Nurses	
		Number	Percentage
Age (years)	Under 30	66	66.7
	Over 30	33	33.3
Gender	Female	80	80.8
	Male	19	19.2
Marital status	Single	33	33.3
	Married	66	66.7

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations of the subjects' scores for the different dimensions of the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
caring	9.00	45.00	32.15	6.00
activism	6.00	45.00	15.47	5.55
trust	10.00	25.00	17.37	3.33
professionalism	6.00	20.00	13.32	3.31
justice	5.00	15.00	10.66	2.42
total	49.00	129.00	88.98	15.37

**Table 3.** The correlation between the mean scores of the subjects' perception of ethical values and their demographic characteristic

Dimension	Age correlation coefficient	Gender correlation coefficient	Marital status correlation coefficient
caring	r=-0.10	r=-0.10	r=-0.08
activism	r=0.30**	r=-0.10	r=-0.15
trust	r=-0.07	r=-0.05	r=-0.40
professionalism	r=-0.40**	r=-0.02	r=-0.10
justice	r=-0.30**	r=-0.20*	r=-0.02
total	r=-0.30**	r=-0.20**	r=-0.20**

**Note:** significance levels of Spearman correlation test for values that are marked with \* and \*\* are considered P<01 and

P<05 respectively

In the present study, the mean of the nurses' total perception of professional values score was 88.98±15.37. The results show that the majority of the subjects rated the importance of the various areas of professional values as "Relatively important" or

“Important” on the 5-point Likert scale. According to the means and standard deviations of the subjects' scores for the different dimensions of professional values, the subjects attached greater importance to caring and trust and less importance to the other dimensions.

Caring for patients on a professional basis lies at the core of nursing ethic codes<sup>17</sup>. Nurses are expected to provide their patients with respectful, efficient and unbiased care<sup>2</sup>. Studies show that nurses and nursing students attach great importance to such concepts as respect, privacy, confidentiality, support and quality care, all of which are related to the dimension of caring<sup>7, 10</sup>. In Taiwan, Lin et al. studied the change in nursing students' perception of professional values between the times when they begin their studies and when they graduate with a bachelor's degree. The 94 subjects were selected from Taiwan University using convenience sampling. Data were collected from second- and last-year students using a pretest and a posttest. The highest mean score was related to the sub-scale of caring; however, there was not a significant difference between the subjects' pretest and posttest scores in this area. On the other hand, the subjects' posttest scores were significantly higher than their pretest scores for the sub-scales of professionalism and activism. Lin et al. conclude that the trend of changes in nursing students' perception of professional values between the times when they begin their education and when they graduate is positive<sup>6</sup>.

Caring for patients is a major part of nursing education and nursing students need to become competent enough in this field before they can graduate<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it is natural that the results of many studies show that nursing students consider caring-related values as the most important professional values.

In a study, Alfred et al. (2011) compared Taiwanese and American nursing students in their attitudes toward professional values: Taiwanese students were found to consider the following caring-related factors as the most important indexes of caring: keeping patients' secrets confidential, respecting patients' privacy and observing the principles of honesty and respect for others<sup>18</sup>. The results of Alfred's study are consistent with the findings of the present study where the subjects were found to consider the indexes of trust as very important.

The results of the present study show that the other personal-social variables of the subjects do not

correlate with their perception of professional values. The results of some studies show that there is not a significant relationship between the age, gender and marital status of nurses and their professional values scores, which is consistent with the findings of the present study<sup>6, 19</sup>. The inconsistencies among the results of different studies can be attributed to such factors as differences in their methodologies and research environments.

In a qualitative study of newly-graduated nurses' experience of the transition from the role of students to the role of nurses, the participants were found to believe that learning ethics during education had enabled them to cope with ethical issues and think critically about ethical matters. The results of the study also showed that, even though some of the nurses had adjusted their ethical values in the real world of work, the majority of the nurses observed the values that they had learned about ethical care at college and used those values as the basis of their performance. These findings confirm the viewpoint that nurse education must be designed within the framework of ethical clinical care and ethical decision-making<sup>20</sup>.

One of the limitations of the present study was the nurses' reluctance to cooperate due to tiredness and their work shifts. To raise the nurses' interest, the researchers thoroughly informed them about the significance of the study and its potential contribution to the advancement of the nursing profession.

### **Conclusion**

In order to improve nurses' awareness of and adherence to nursing professional values, policy-makers and educators need to develop and employ effective education programs.

### **Suggestions and application of the findings of the study**

The findings of the study can be used to develop education plans that stress improvement in the quality and quantity of education on professional values; this will, in turn, encourage nurses to internalize professional values and become committed to fulfilling their professional duties. By improving nurses' senses of professional responsibility, these new education programs will not only increase the quality of care, but improve nursing clinical, educational and research conditions in the current social, economic, cultural and religious context and, eventually, raise the status of nursing as a profession and make it more respectable.

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