

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Medicine Science 2022;11(2):452-6

## The ethical attitudes for nursing care of nursing students and their ability to manage patient expectations

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Received 14 July 2021; Accepted 02 November 2021

Available online 06.03.2022 with doi: 10.5455/medscience.2021.07.229

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### Abstract

The literature lacked research examining the ethical attitudes of nursing students in nursing care and their ability to manage patient expectations. This study aimed to determine the relationship between nursing students' ethical attitudes in providing care and their ability to manage patient expectations. This descriptive-correlational study was carried out in the nursing school a university located in eastern region of Turkey. The population of the study consisted of 1254 students studying at nursing school. The sample consisted of 400 students. The data were collected using the Participant Information Form, Ethical Attitude Scale for Nursing Care and Ability of the Managing Patient Expectations Scale. Descriptive statistics, MANOVA, Correlation and the Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis were used to evaluate the data. Within the scope of the study, students' ethical attitudes in nursing care and their ability of the managing patient expectations were found to be at high levels. On the other hand, it was found that the ethical attitude in nursing care had a significant and positive effect on the ability to manage patient expectations. The results of the study indicate that a nurse's ethical attitude is a significant factor that predicts their ability to manage patient expectations.

**Keywords:** Ethics, nursing care, nursing students, patient expectations

### Introduction

Today, nursing practices have made considerable progress owing to high technological and financial advancements. Consequently, nurses face complex care situations where they are expected to take autonomous decisions about how to provide good care to patients [1]. Providing good care means striving for full improvement of the patient's well-being; in other words, evaluating the patient's physical, psychological, relational, social, moral and ethical well-being as a whole is deemed a moral responsibility [2]. The ethical dimension of care cannot be limited to specific ethical dilemmas in the context of the beginning and end of life. On the contrary, the ethical dimension of care is an important part of the nursing practice [3]. Nurses make ethical decisions in providing care to patients daily. Using physical restraints in elderly care and

handling communication or privacy issues are examples of such ethical decisions. Making the correct decisions in such complicated situations requires not only medical/technical competence but also the ability to develop a critical approach and ethical competence [5].

Nursing education includes vast content related to care and practices, and ethics is gaining increasing importance in this stream of education. As the ethical dimension of care is the basis of the nursing practice, it should be addressed. Strengthening nursing students' perception of ethics in their education shall make clinical practices more accurate [5].

Nurses are the leading supporters of patient education and safety. Patients have various expectations from the moment they arrive at the hospital [6]. These expectations vary depending on many factors, such as the severity, clinical signs and course of the disease and their bio-psycho-social status, social support system and past experiences. Patient expectations constitute an important psycho-social issue that is closely related to the sense of satisfaction [7]. Developing good communication with patients, encouraging patients to express their expectations and managing patient expectations are, therefore, important nursing approaches. Some

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healthcare professionals are sensitive to patient expectations, while others may ignore them. Defining and understanding patient expectations improves patients' compliance with treatment, promotes optimism and recovery and helps to create a therapeutic environment [8].

In the literature, there was no study examining the ethical attitudes of nursing students in nursing care and their ability to manage patient expectations. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate nursing students' ethical attitudes in nursing care and their ability to manage patient expectations. The assumption underlying this study was that developing a positive ethical attitude in nursing care will help nursing students manage patient expectations.

## Materials and Methods

### Design

This study was carried out in a descriptive-correlational manner.

### Setting and participants

The research was performed in the nursing school at university in eastern Turkey. The population of the study consisted of 1,254 students studying in the nursing school. The sample of the study comprised 400 students with 0.95 representation power, 0.05 error and 0.95 confidence interval in the power analysis. The data were collected from June to July 2020.

### Data collection

Three data collection tools were used: A Participant Information Form for evaluating the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students, Ethical Attitude Scale for Nursing Care (EASNC) and Ability of the Managing Patient Expectations Scale (AMPES). Scale forms were prepared by the researchers online and data were collected from students via e-mail. It took about 10–15 minutes to fill in the scales.

### Participant Information Form

This form used to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of students consists of seven questions investigating students' experiences related to ethical issues.

### EASNC

This 5-point Likert-type scale, which was developed by Ozciftci and Akin in 2020, consists of 34 items ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The scale has one dimension. Whereas the high scores obtained from the scale refer to a positive ethical attitude, the low scores refer to a negative ethical attitude [9]. The original Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.96 and, in this study, it was found to be 0.97.

### AMPES

This scale, which was developed by Micoogullari et al. in 2017, consists of nine items and two sub-dimensions. The first six questions of the scale relate to the “supporting expectations” sub-dimension, whereas questions 7, 8 and 9 relate to the “suppressing

expectations” sub-dimension. One can obtain a score between 9 and 45 points from this 5-point Likert-type scale, and a high score indicates that the ability to manage patient expectations is high [10]. The original Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to range between 0.53 and 0.96 and in this study, it was found to be 0.84.

### Ethical approval

Before beginning the research, written consent was obtained from the Deanship of the Nursing school, Inonu University, and ethical approval was received from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethical Committee of the Institute of Medical Sciences, Inonu University (Decision number 885). Voluntary consent was obtained from participants prior to beginning the study.

### Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), linear regression, correlation and Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis were used to evaluate the data. The results were evaluated at the 95% confidence interval and the significance was at the level of  $p < 0.05$ .

### Results

The nursing students' mean age was  $20.33 \pm 2.57$ ; 74.3% of them were female; 41% of them were first-year students; 59.3% of them had received prior education about ethics; and 49.5% of them had received this education in school. It was found that 85.8% of participants had not had prior problems with ethics and 29.8% of them needed education about patients' and nurses' rights, while 28.7% of them needed education about acting per occupational ethics. Students' EASNC and AMPES mean scores were found to be  $152.3 \pm 20.9$  and  $37.2 \pm 5.7$ , respectively. Their ethical attitudes in nursing care and ability to manage patient expectations were found to be at high levels (Table 1).

In the study, no significant difference was found between the variables of age, gender and having encountered an ethical problem before and mean scores on EASNC and AMPES. It was determined that there was a significant difference between the “receiving ethical education” variable and the mean scores on EASNC and AMPES (Table 2).

In line with the results obtained from the MANOVA, a significant difference was found between participants' mean scores on EASNC by the class variable. Bonferroni correction showed that the difference was due to the 4th-year students' higher mean scores on EASNC than those of the other students (Table 3).

Linear regression was used to evaluate the effect of nursing students' ethical attitudes in nursing care on their ability to manage patient expectations. The total AMPES score was used as the dependent variable. Ethical attitude was found to be effective on the ability to manage patient expectations and  $R = .752$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .565$ . The total EASNC score explained 56.5% of the total variance in the dependent variable of the ability to manage patient expectations, and this result was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The result of the regression analysis revealed that ethical attitude in nursing care had a positive effect ( $B = .206$ ) on ability to manage patient expectations (Table 4).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants

|                                                      | Number (N) | %    | $\bar{x} \pm SD$ |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------|------|------------------|
| Age                                                  |            |      | 20.33 $\pm$ 2.57 |
| Gender                                               |            |      |                  |
| Female                                               | 297        | 74.3 |                  |
| Male                                                 | 103        | 25.8 |                  |
| Class                                                |            |      |                  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> year                                 | 164        | 41   |                  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> year                                 | 95         | 23.7 |                  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> year                                 | 73         | 18.3 |                  |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> year                                 | 68         | 17   |                  |
| Prior education in ethical issues                    |            |      |                  |
| Yes                                                  | 237        | 59.3 |                  |
| No                                                   | 163        | 40.8 |                  |
| Where one obtained education about ethical issues    |            |      |                  |
| School                                               | 197        | 49.5 |                  |
| Internet                                             | 20         | 5    |                  |
| Books                                                | 10         | 2.5  |                  |
| Friend, specialist, etc.                             | 10         | 3    |                  |
| Prior ethical problem with a patient                 |            |      |                  |
| Yes                                                  | 57         | 14.2 |                  |
| No                                                   | 343        | 85.8 |                  |
| Information requirements about the subject of ethics |            |      |                  |
| Acting in accordance with occupational ethics        | 115        | 28.7 |                  |
| Rights of patients and nurses                        | 119        | 29.8 |                  |
| Legal responsibilities                               | 74         | 18.5 |                  |
| Ethical decision-making                              | 57         | 14.2 |                  |
| Reporting unethical practices                        | 35         | 8.8  |                  |
| EASNC                                                |            |      | 152.3 $\pm$ 20.9 |
| AMPES                                                |            |      | 37.2 $\pm$ 5.7   |

**Table 2.** Comparison of students' mean scores on EASNC and AMPES by variable

|                                      | EASNC            |          |       | AMPES          |           |       |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------|-------|----------------|-----------|-------|
|                                      | Mean             | t        | p     | Mean           | t         | p     |
| Age                                  |                  | r: -0.12 | 0.16  |                | r: -0.151 | 0.13  |
| Gender                               |                  |          |       |                |           |       |
| Female                               | 150.1 $\pm$ 21.5 | 0.661    | 0.509 | 37.2 $\pm$ 5.5 | -0.129    | 0.868 |
| Male                                 | 152.1 $\pm$ 20.6 |          |       | 37.2 $\pm$ 5.7 |           |       |
| Prior education on ethical issues    |                  |          |       |                |           |       |
| Yes                                  | 154.1 $\pm$ 17.3 | 2.041    | 0.042 | 37.4 $\pm$ 0.4 | 2.38      | 0.037 |
| No                                   | 149.8 $\pm$ 25.0 |          |       | 35.8 $\pm$ 0.7 |           |       |
| Prior ethical problem with a patient |                  |          |       |                |           |       |
| Yes                                  | 151.7 $\pm$ 21.9 | -1.102   | 0.27  | 36.5 $\pm$ 5.2 | -0.230    | 0.818 |
| No                                   | 152.4 $\pm$ 20.9 |          |       | 37.3 $\pm$ 5.7 |           |       |

**Table 3.** Multivariate tests of EASNC and AMPES

|                                                    | EASNC           |       |       | AMPES          |       |       |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|
|                                                    | Mean            | F     | p     | Mean           | F     | p     |
| Class                                              |                 |       |       |                |       |       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> year                               | 149.3 $\pm$ 2.1 |       |       | 37 $\pm$ 0.5   |       |       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> year                               | 149.7 $\pm$ 3.0 | 4.46  | 0.035 | 36.5 $\pm$ 0.8 | 0.682 | 0.41  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> year                               | 149.9 $\pm$ 3.4 |       |       | 36.6 $\pm$ 0.9 |       |       |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> year                               | 160.6 $\pm$ 4.1 |       |       | 37.8 $\pm$ 1.1 |       |       |
| Where one obtained education about ethical issues  |                 |       |       |                |       |       |
| School                                             | 147.1 $\pm$ 2.8 |       |       | 36.4 $\pm$ 4   |       |       |
| Internet                                           | 153.9 $\pm$ 1.9 | 0.608 | 0.657 | 39.2 $\pm$ 1.2 | 0.425 | 0.791 |
| Books                                              | 154.2 $\pm$ 4.7 |       |       | 37.2 $\pm$ 1.9 |       |       |
| Friend, specialist, etc.                           | 150.9 $\pm$ 7.2 |       |       | 37.6 $\pm$ 1.5 |       |       |
| Information requirements for the subject of ethics |                 |       |       |                |       |       |
| Acting in accordance with occupational ethics      | 150.6 $\pm$ 2.9 |       |       | 36.8 $\pm$ 0.7 |       |       |
| Rights of patients and nurses                      | 148.5 $\pm$ 2.8 |       |       | 36.7 $\pm$ 0.7 |       |       |
| Legal responsibilities                             | 146.2 $\pm$ 3.2 | 2.128 | 0.77  | 35.8 $\pm$ 0.8 | 1.46  | 0.214 |
| Ethical decision-making                            | 161.6 $\pm$ 3.5 |       |       | 38.7 $\pm$ 0.9 |       |       |
| Reporting unethical practices                      | 152.2 $\pm$ 4.5 |       |       | 36.7 $\pm$ 1.2 |       |       |

**Table 4.** The effect of ethical attitude in nursing care on the ability to manage patient expectations

| Model              | Unstandardized Coefficients |       | Standardized Coefficients |        | Sig. | F      | Sig.              | R                 | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|--------|------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
|                    | B                           | SE    | Beta                      | t      |      |        |                   |                   |                         |
| <b>Constant</b>    | 5.904                       | 1.388 |                           | 4.253  | .000 |        |                   |                   |                         |
| <b>EASNC total</b> | .206                        | .009  | .752                      | 22.778 | .000 | 518.83 | .000 <sup>b</sup> | .752 <sup>a</sup> | .565                    |

a. Dependent Variable: AMPEStotal  
b. Predictors: (Constant), EASNC total

## Discussion

Our evaluation of the ethical attitudes of nursing students in nursing care and their ability to manage patient expectations revealed that students' ethical attitudes and ability to manage patient expectations were at high levels. Individuals' ethical sensitivity levels can be observed by their ethical attitudes [9]. Owing to the scarcity of studies examining ethical attitudes in the literature, the current findings are discussed in relation to ethical sensitivity. While the students' ethical sensitivity levels were found to be moderate in general in the literature [11-13], our finding that the ethical attitudes of students high contributed a different perspective to the literature.

In our research, we determined a significant difference between the year of study and ethical attitude in nursing care, and it was the 4th-year students who caused this difference. In a previous study carried out with 1<sup>st</sup>- and 4<sup>th</sup>-year students, a significant difference was found between the year variable and ethical sensitivity; the ethical sensitivity of 4th-year students to patient-oriented care and ethical dilemmas was found to be higher [14]. In a study carried out with nursing students in Turkey, it was found that there was a significant difference between a year of study and ethical sensitivity [15]. The reason why the 4<sup>th</sup>-year students exhibited higher levels of ethical attitudes in the present study was that these students had taken ethics and deontology (code of conduct) courses in their 3rd year and had greater professional development and clinical practice experience in patient care than the other students.

We determined in our research that more than half of the students had received education on ethical issues and that there was a significant difference between the variables of receiving education and ethical attitude in nursing care. Students who had received such education were found to have higher levels of ethical attitudes. Park et al. reported that students who received an ethical education had higher levels of ethical sensitivity [14]. Furthermore, Gul et al. stated that the ethical decision-making levels of students who received an ethical education may progress [16]. Assuming that ethical education is meant to give students foresight, the fact that ethical attitudes improved with education was an expected result.

In this study, it was found that 14.2% of the students had confronted an ethical problem with patients, but no significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) was found between the variable of confronting an ethical problem and ethical attitude in nursing care. In a prior study, 55.5% of students encountered an ethical problem before or during clinical practice experience [17]. The fact that most of the students in the present study were in first year and the inability to perform clinical applications during the data collection process due to the COVID-19 pandemic likely affected the level of encountering an ethical problem.

We found ethical attitude in nursing care to be a significant factor predicting one's ability to manage patient expectations. According to Ozciftci and Akin, improving ethical attitudes in nursing care is an approach that benefits and encourages solutions for facing problems in clinical areas [9]. Professional nursing care can develop through nurses' practical knowledge, ability to understand human behavior and communication, and commitment to professional values [18]. The results of this research support these assumptions. Improving ethical attitudes in care would likely contribute significantly to meeting patient expectations and improving the quality of care.

Meeting patients' expectations is one of the most important parameters of satisfaction. Generally, patients are not satisfied with the treatment and care they receive and, thus, their expectations are not met [10]. To meet the needs and requirements of patients, holistic nursing care, in which habits, beliefs and values are handled together, should be pursued [19].

There was no significant difference between the age, gender and year of study variables and the students' ability to manage patient expectations. Inanici, Yardimci, Binatamir and Yuksel obtained results like ours [20]. The ability of students who had received an ethical education to manage patient expectations was found to be higher than that of students who had not received education on that subject. Including topics in the content of ethics education, such as noticing patient expectations, meeting these expectations and the importance of therapeutic communication, would improve students' ability to manage expectations.

## Limitations

Conducting this study only in a nursing school, having courses online due to the covid-19 pandemic at the time of the study, and delaying clinical practice are the limitations of the study. The fact that the data was collected in a single nursing school prevented the results from being generalized to all nursing students. The fact that first year nursing students didn't go to clinical practice due to the pandemic process and therefore not to encounter ethical problems may have affected the development of ethical sensitivity.

## Conclusions

In this study, nursing students' ethical attitudes in nursing care were found to have significant effects on the students' ability to manage patient expectations. Class, having received an ethical education and having faced an ethical problem were found to be important variables in shaping ethical attitudes and the ability to manage patient expectations.

In line with these results, the following recommendations can

be made there should be wide coverage of ethical issues and patient expectations in theoretical and clinical nursing education; awareness should be raised about the ethical problems a nurse is likely to encounter and their solutions; students' levels of ethical attitudes and ability to manage patient expectations should be assessed and followed up; and research with larger and different groups should be conducted. It is recommended to support case discussions and case studies with simulation scenarios, especially to improve the ethical attitude of first year nursing students.

#### Conflict of interests

*The authors declare that they have no competing interests.*

#### Financial Disclosure

*All authors declare no financial support.*

#### Ethical approval

*Ethical approval was received from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethical Committee of the Institute of Medical Sciences, Inonu University (Decision number 885).*

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