

Original Research Article

# A Descriptive Study to Assess the Knowledge and Practice Regarding Legal and Ethical Aspects among Staff Nurses

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction-** Legal ethics is a term used to describe the code of conduct governing professional behavior, which establishes the nature of obligations owed to individuals and to society to interact with one another.

<sup>[1]</sup> In modern society, ethics defines how individuals, professionals and corporations choose to interact with one another. <sup>[2]</sup> Legal ethics is the minimum standard of the appropriate conduct within the legal profession. <sup>[3]</sup>

According to medical dictionary the word ethics is derived from the Greek word 'Ethos' which means "character" and from the Latin word 'Mores' which means "customs". <sup>[4]</sup> Nursing ethics is a system of principles governing the conduct of a nurse and is a branch of applied ethics that concerns itself with activities in the field of nursing. These are the values or moral principles governing relationships between the nurse and patient, the patient's family, other members of the health profession and the general public.

The code of ethics for registered nurses is a statement of ethical commitment of nurses to those they serve. Nurses have developed it for their profession and set forth the ethical standards by which they are to conduct their nursing practice (CAN code of ethics 2002). <sup>[5]</sup>

The legal implications of nursing practice are related to licensure, state and federal laws, scope of practice and a public expectation that nurses practice at a high professional standard.

**Materials & Method-** Fifty (50) staff nurses of Civil Hospital, Phase-6, Mohali were selected by consecutive sampling as per inclusion and exclusion criteria. The data was collected from subjects by structured questionnaire, consisting of socio-bio-demographic characteristics, questionnaire regarding legal and ethical aspects and checklist regarding practice of legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration.

**Result-** The study findings revealed that the mean knowledge score of subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects was  $17.44 \pm 4.44$  and maximum mean practice score of the subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects of drug administration was  $13.36 \pm 1.66$ . It also showed that maximum 42 (80.00%) of subjects had average level of knowledge and majority 49 (98.00%) of subjects had good level of practice. The statistical testing of knowledge and practice association revealed a moderately positive correlation. The association of knowledge and practice with various socio-bio-demographic variables (i.e.,- age and professional experience) when statistically tested showed no significant association of  $p > 0.05$ . Whereas in the statistical testing of association of knowledge and practice with professional qualification, only practice was found to be significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Conclusion-** It was concluded that majority of subjects 41 (82.00%) had average level of knowledge regarding legal and ethical aspects with mean  $\pm$  SD of  $17.44 \pm 1.44$ . It also revealed the mean practice score regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration as  $13.36 \pm 1.66$  and maximum 48 (96.00%) had good level of practice.

**Key Words-** Knowledge, Practice, Legal, Ethics, Staff nurses

## INTRODUCTION

Ethics are standards which health care professionals referred for the determination of right action. Nursing ethics is a system of principles governing the conduct of a nurse and is a branch of applied ethics that concerns itself with activities in the field of nursing. The dictionary defines nursing ethics as the values and principles governing nursing practice, conduct and relationships. [6]

According to the INC Code of Nursing Ethics includes Advocacy, Responsibility, Accountability and Confidentiality. Nurses should be sensitive to the ethical challenges and do their best to fulfill their moral duties. It also emphasizes the importance of informed consent and address main ethical issues in everyday practice such as respect to privacy and confidentiality of patients, clients, relationship with colleagues, efficient performance of the professional duties and protection of participants in research. The nurse's education, license and standard provide the framework by which nurses are expected to practice. [7]

The legal implications of nursing practice are related to licensure, state and federal laws, scope of practice and a public expectation that nurses practice at a high professional standard. The nurse's education, license and standard provide the framework by which nurses are expected to practice. When a nurse's practice falls below acceptable standards of care and competence, this exposes the nurse to litigation. Both litigation and professional license review can result in reprimand of a nurse's license or loss of a license. [7]

Legal and ethical issues are important to determine whether nurses have performed duties in an appropriate manner and whether the duties are performed within the standards of care.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

A total of fifty (50) staff nurses employed in Civil Hospital, Phase 6, Mohali were

selected by consecutive sampling as per inclusion and exclusion criteria.

- The subjects were informed about the purpose and objectives of study.
- The informed verbal consent was taken from subjects.
- Selection of study sample was done by using consecutive sampling.
- The data was collected through self-structured questionnaire consisting of socio-bio-demographic characteristics, questionnaire regarding legal and ethical aspects and checklist regarding practice of legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration.

### *Inclusion criteria*

- Staff nurses working in various areas of Civil Hospital, Phase 6, Mohali.
- Staff nurses having work experience of more than one month in current area.
- Staff nurses willing to participate in the study.

### *Exclusion criteria*

- Staff nurses having work experience of less than 1 month.

### **Data processing and analysis-**

The Collected data has been analyzed using both Descriptive and Inferential statistics and presented in the form of tables and figures. The various statistical measures used for analysis included means of central tendency (mean), range, SD, frequency, percentage distribution and were presented in the form of tables and figures. Association of knowledge and practice was assessed by using Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient and association with selected socio-bio-demographic variables by ANOVA test.

## RESULTS

Analysis and interpretation of data were organised under the following headings:

**Part 1-** It included data related to socio-bio-demographic variables.

**Part 2-** It included data related to knowledge regarding legal and ethical aspects among staff nurses.

**Part 3-** Data related to practice regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration among staff nurses.

**Part 4-** It included data related to association of knowledge and practice regarding legal and ethical aspects among staff nurse.

**Table 1: Mean knowledge score of subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects** N=50

Descriptive parameter	Knowledge score
Mean	17.44
SD	04.44
Mean	% 51.29
Range	0-34

**Table 2: Mean distribution of knowledge among subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects.** N=50

Categories	Range	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean %
General information	0-9	4.26 $\pm$ 09.08	23.66
Consent	0-5	2.64 $\pm$ 08.16	26.40
Ethical Dilemma	0-3	1.62 $\pm$ 60.46	27.00
Statutory issues	0-8	4.34 $\pm$ 09.32	27.12
Code of ethics	0-9	4.14 $\pm$ 09.19	23.00

**Table 3: Level of knowledge of subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects** N=50

Level*	f (%)
Good	03 (06.00)
Average	40 (80.00)
Poor	07 (14.00)

\* Good: 24-34 Average: 13-23 Poor:  $\leq$ 12

**Table 4: Mean practice score of subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration** N=50

Descriptive parameter	Practice score
Mean	13.36
SD	1.66
Mean	% 83.5
Range	0-16

**Table 5: Level of practice of subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration** N=50

Level*	f (%)
Good	43 (86.00)
Average	07 (14.00)
Poor	00 (00.00)

\*Good: 12-16 Average: 7-11 Poor:  $\leq$ 6

**Table 6: Relationship of knowledge and practice regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing** N=50

Knowledge Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Practice Mean ( $\bar{y}$ )	$\Sigma(x-\bar{x})(y-\bar{y})$	$\Sigma(x-\bar{x})$	$\Sigma(y-\bar{y})$	r
17.44	13.36	200.08	983.32	137.52	0.54

## DISCUSSION

In the study, it was found that maximum 40 (80.00%) subjects had average level of knowledge whereas 07 (14.00%) subjects had poor knowledge while only 03 (06.00%) had good knowledge regarding legal and ethical aspects among staff nurses.

The present study depicts that maximum 43 (86.00%) subjects had good

level of practice whereas 07 (14.00%) subjects had average practice while none (00.00%) of subjects had poor level of practice.

The relationship of knowledge and practice regarding legal and ethical aspects depicts that the mean knowledge and practice score was 17.44 and 13.36 respectively. The statistical testing shows correlation coefficient,  $r = 0.54$  and hence there was moderately positive co-relation between knowledge and practice level of subjects.

Hemant, Kalpana and Mathur (2013) conducted a study on 443 (134 ANM, 304 GNM, 17 various specialist trained- nurses) about Responsibilities of Nursing Staff in Administration of Patient Care in Trust Hospital. The findings showed that nursing staff had poor knowledge on patients' rights and also on their legal obligations towards patients. This study substantiated the fact that nurses had poor knowledge on the law that governing their profession. In contrary to that, the present study revealed that maximum 40 (80.00%) of subjects had average level of knowledge ( $17.44 \pm 4.44$ ) regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing while only 07 (14.00%) had poor knowledge and maximum 43 (86.00%) subjects had good level of practice ( $13.36 \pm 1.66$ ) regarding legal and ethical aspects of drug administration whereas none had poor level of practice. [8]

Rajesh and Santosh (2011) conducted a descriptive study on 30 staff nurses at selected psychiatric center of Jaipur, Rajasthan to assess Knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities in the field of psychiatric nursing. The score was categorized into three levels: High (46-60), Moderate (31-45) and Low (0-30). The findings revealed that majority (90%) of the nurses possess moderate level of knowledge. There was no significant association found between the knowledge with age, sex, marital status, designation of nurses, total clinical experience and in-service education while professional qualification and their psychiatric

experience was significantly associated with the knowledge level of the nurses. Similar to that, the present study revealed that maximum 40 (80.00%) subjects had average level of knowledge ( $17.44 \pm 4.44$ ) regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing. No significant association was found between knowledge level with age, professional qualification and professional experience. [9]

## CONCLUSION

The mean knowledge score of the subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects was  $17.44 \pm 4.44$  between range 0-34 with mean percentage 51.29% and maximum 40 (80.00%) subjects had average level of knowledge regarding legal and ethical aspects.

The mean practice score of the subjects regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration was  $13.36 \pm 1.66$  between range 0-16 and mean percentage 83.5%. It revealed that maximum 43 (86.00%) subjects had good level of practice regarding legal and ethical aspects related to drug administration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the study participants for their cooperation.

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How to cite this article: Kaur S. A descriptive study to assess the knowledge and practice regarding legal and ethical aspects among staff nurses. Int J Health Sci Res. 2017; 7(5):243-246.

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