Review

Nursing Ethics as a Foundation in Nursing Practice: A Literature Review

Ni Made Ratih Comala Dewi1*, I Gusti Ngurah Aryana1, I Kadek Miki Indra Bela1, Ni Kadek Nefi Widiastuti1, I Kadek Andika Dwi Putra1, & Ni Iuh Adi Satriani1

1Institute of Technology and Health Science Bali, Denpasar, Indonesia

Article Info

Introduction: Complexity in the healthcare environment causes problems in nursing practice. The nursing code of ethics has been designed as an appropriate guideline for behavior and helps decision-making. Nursing ethics requires nurses to comply with ethical principles to produce quality nursing care. Therefore, this study aims to illustrate the importance of nursing ethics as a foundation for nursing practice.

Methods: In the case of the current research, the articles were selected according to PRISMA guidelines. A literature review used three journal databases: ScienceDirect, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The keywords in this literature review are adjusted to the Medical Subject Heading (MeSH), which consists of "nursing ethics," "code of ethics," AND "professional nurse." Several inclusion criteria were set to obtain eligible articles published between 2014 and 2023 and written in English and Bahasa. Fifteen eligible articles were finally included in the analysis.

Results: These findings highlight the critical role of understanding ethics, integrity, and moral responsibility and the importance of nursing codes of ethics in implementing nursing practice to improve the quality of nursing care and improve the quality of care.

Conclusion: Nursing ethics is ethos. Integrity and moral responsibility are at the heart of ethics. Nurses must have an understanding of ethics for self-development and nursing services. As a relevant source, the code of ethics refers to the system of rules. Applying the code of ethics in nursing practice improves the quality of nursing care and service to guarantee patient safety.

Keywords: health care delivery, code of ethics, nursing ethics, nursing services, patient safety

*Corresponding Author:
e-mail: ratih89comala@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Ethics is ontologically more about what happens to relationships between people. The focus of ethics shifts from morals (right or wrong) to ethos (values). Ethos is based on dignity and virtue. Dignity is the difference and uniqueness of another person in a caring relationship. Virtue is a picture of good character and qualities. Virtue answers the question, who should I be? The desired answer must be "good human being.". Virtue is strongly influenced by ethos. Ethos is the foundation of human values formed internally through one's values. When humans connect with their ethos, there is a sense of home. The feeling of being at home gives man courage, joy, warmth, and inner strength. Ethos is manifested through human action. A sense of home is the essence of virtue, where the willingness to serve, take responsibility, give what is good, and do something wholeheartedly for the patient becomes real. The ethos of love, human charity, values of compassion, and dignity are integrated into nurses on an ongoing basis, so this is the ethics that is considered best and maintained by following external values such as laws, directives, norms, and rules [1].

Nursing ethics has a central role in the moral behavior of nurses towards patients, which significantly influences the improvement of patient health [2]. Nursing ethics permeates all these nursing roles because nurses deal directly with patients. They need to pay attention to ethical principles during nursing practice. The professional relationships of nurses in patient care and healthcare teams pose ethical issues unique to nursing [3]. The problem of ethical behavior that occurs in the nursing process is a sense of injustice in nursing services, lack of attention and concern for patients, neglect of patient rights, lack of respect for patients, and high demands for professional ethics in every nursing service [4]. In addition, ethical behavior problems in the provision of nursing services will impact the emergence of dissatisfaction with the nursing services provided. The patient will feel his needs are not being met and he is not getting attention from the nurse. In providing nursing services, it must refer to the nursing code of ethics as an ethical guide that cannot be negotiated [5].

The nursing code of ethics is part of health ethics that applies ethical values to maintaining public health services. According to the book Basic Nursing Science [6] The International Council for Nurses (ICN) adopted the code of ethics for the first time in 1953. In Indonesia, the nursing code of ethics was prepared by the Indonesia National Nurse Association (INNA) through the INNA National Conference in Jakarta on November 29, 1989; it consists of 5 chapters and 17 articles. A code of ethics establishes standards of behavior consistent with what the profession, other professionals, and society expect of a nurse [3].

The nursing code of ethics reflects the collective values of the profession, but it is still poorly understood. Although practitioners value and understand their codes of ethics, research shows that such codes are rarely used in clinical practice. This happens for various reasons, such as lack of knowledge, conflicts in the workplace, and institutional obstacles [7]. Nursing codes of ethics have
been designed to meet the need for ethical principles and standards and appropriate guidelines to assist when making decisions and facing moral challenges. These codes are intended to act as standards in the nursing profession [8]. The purpose of the nursing code of ethics is that nurses, in carrying out their duties and functions, always respect the dignity and dignity of patients as human beings and as a guideline in nurse behavior when carrying out their work profession to avoid things that violate the code of ethics. Therefore, this literature aims to explore and understand the purpose of nursing codes of ethics applicable to nursing practice.

METHODS
Identify the research question

The research question investigated in this literature review was: 'What is known in the existing literature about ethical understanding, integrity, and moral responsibility, and the importance of using a nursing code of ethics?' This research question was intended to be broad, as was the aim of the literature review, to ensure the inclusion of several concepts to provide researchers with a deeper understanding of nurses' interactions with patients using the nursing code of ethics in carrying out nursing practice.

Identify relevant studies

This review used a literature study design and a comprehensive strategy. Articles were selected according to PRISMA guidelines, and articles were searched for in international research journal databases via the Internet using ScienceDirect, PubMed, and Google Scholar. All searches were performed in November 2023 and published from 2014 to 2023. The keywords in this literature review are adapted to the Medical Subject Heading (MeSH) consisting of "nursing ethics," "code of ethics," and "professional nurse."

Study selection

The initial search yielded 966 results, 537 of which were duplicates. Handsearching from relevant journal articles resulted in one additional unique article. Of the 429 remaining results, 29 remained after title and abstract review. After a full-text review, 15 articles were included in the study. A PRISMA flowchart outlining the search can be found in Figure 1.

Articles were included if they met all the following criteria:
1. Examined the defined health professionals (nurses)
2. Examined a formal professional code from a regulatory or national body
3. Examined the use, understanding, or awareness of the code (or synonyms of these concepts);
4. Empirical studies (of any study design including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies)

Excluded were articles not in English and Bahasa, about codes written by employers/institutions, commentaries and editorials (or other non-empirical evidence), and were solely about students or existing literature reviews. The date limit was set from 2014-2023 to include all relevant literature. The database and hand searching were conducted
by one reviewer (R.C-D.). Title/abstract reviewing and full-text review were undertaken independently by two reviewers (R.C-D. and G.N-A.), with any conflicts resolved by consensus or using a third reviewer (M.I-B). A minimum of two reviewers were involved in each stage of inclusion/exclusion to reduce bias [9].

**Charting the data**

Data in a literature review should be charted logically and descriptively, remaining relevant to the research question. A form for charting data was developed based on the study by Peters et al, which suggested extraction fields for a systematic application of literature reviews [10]. Table 1 provides a list of the included articles and the extracted data. From these data, three themes were identified:

1. Ethical Understanding
2. Integrity and moral responsibility
3. The importance of using a nursing code of ethics

These themes were noted to be recurring throughout the articles and relevant to the research question.

A single author (R.C-D) charted the data and identified themes. Note that the total number of themes allocated exceeds the included articles, as most had multiple themes allocated.

**Collating, summarising, and reporting the results**

Of the 15 articles identified, they were focused on nursing. All except seven studies were of a cross-sectional design. The remaining studies were qualitative through focus groups (three) or semi-structured interviews (one). There was a good spread of international data, with data originating from 9 individual counties. The United States had the most relevant studies (three), followed by Iran (three) and Turkey (three). The remaining countries all had one result, as shown in Table 1.
Table 1

Summary of the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Author/Year/Country</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Research method and population</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lillemor O’stman, Yvonne Nasman, Katie Eriksson* and Lisbet Nystrom [1] 2017 Finland</td>
<td>Ethos: The heart of ethics and health</td>
<td>Hermeneutical design sample of PhD students in nursing and nursing sciences</td>
<td>Ethics is an ethos that consists of internal and external dimensions, namely norms, rules, laws</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Ali Dehghani, Leili Mosalanejad and Nahid Dehghan-Nayeri [2] 2015 Iran</td>
<td>Factors affecting professional ethics in nursing practice in Iran: a qualitative study</td>
<td>Qualitative research 30 nurses with at least five years of experience using purposive sampling.</td>
<td>Internal factors related to individual character, responsibilities, and communication challenges; external factors include organizational prerequisites, support systems, educational and cultural development</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Batoool Poorchangizi et al. [11] 2017 Iran</td>
<td>The importance of professional values from clinical nurses'</td>
<td>Cross-sectional study sample of 250 clinical nurses</td>
<td>There is a statistically significant relationship between nurse age, work</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>J. Sinclair, E. Papps, B. Marshall [12] 2016 New Zealand</td>
<td>Nursing students' experiences of ethical issues in clinical practice: A New Zealand study</td>
<td>A quantitative descriptive survey designed by 373 undergraduate nursing students</td>
<td>The ethical education provided to students should reflect everyday problems to prepare them for the world of work.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Catherine Robichaux, et al. [13] 2021 America</td>
<td>Ethics Education for Nurses: Foundations for an Integrated Curriculum</td>
<td>Descriptive qualitative research</td>
<td>The necessary characteristics of nurses are knowledge, skills, and motivation.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Cynthia M. Clark [14] 2016 America</td>
<td>An Evidence-Based Approach to Integrate Civility, Professionalism, and Ethical Practice Into Nursing Curricula</td>
<td>Descriptive research</td>
<td>This evidence-based approach integrates the concepts of civility, professionalism, and ethical practice in nursing.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Fei Fei Huang, Qing Yang, Jie Zhang, Kaveh Khoshnood, Jing Ping Zhang [15] 2015 China</td>
<td>Chinese nurses' perceived barriers and facilitators of ethical sensitivity</td>
<td>Cross-sectional quantitative study A sample of 306 nurses</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge related to ethics and work experience as a nurse are obstacles to improving ethics.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Derek Collings-Hughes Ruth Townsend Brett Williams [16] 2022 Australia</td>
<td>Paramedic use and understanding of their professional code of conduct</td>
<td>This research qualitative descriptive design Participants are invited for interviews</td>
<td>The results of the study wanted to understand the concept of the code of ethics broadly and better integrate it into the profession.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Marzieh Momennasab, Afifeh Rahmani, Koshkaki, Camellia Torabizadeh and Seyed Ziaeddin Tabei [8] 2015 Iran</td>
<td>Nurses’ adherence to ethical codes: The viewpoints of patients, nurses, and managers</td>
<td>Descriptive-comparative study with a sample of 100 patients, 100 nurses, and 30 managers</td>
<td>Based on the results, 70% of patients, 86% of nurses, and 53.3% of nurse managers rated nurses’ compliance with the code of ethics as satisfactory.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Risnawati, Haeril Amir [18] 2022</td>
<td>Analysis of applying behavior Longitudinal research using panel study</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurse behavior towards the realm of patients, practices, &amp;</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Author/Year/Country</td>
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<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>elaborate of the nursing code of ethics to nurses at Makassar Teaching Hospital.</td>
<td>method. A sample of 183 nurses</td>
<td>peers is included in the prime category in elaborating the nursing code of ethics.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Ayse Deliktas, Oznur Korukcu, Ruveyde Aydin, Kamile Kabukcuoğu [19] 2019 Turkey</td>
<td>Nursing Students' Perceptions of Nursing Metaparadigms:</td>
<td>Phenomenological Study Data was collected from 13 fourth-year students selected through purposive sampling and interviewed in a semi-structured format.</td>
<td>Most participants in the study associated nursing with humanism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gulhan Erkus, Leyla Dinc [20] 2018 Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish nurses' perceptions of professional values</td>
<td>Cross-sectional descriptive research 310 nurses working in public, university, and private hospitals in May-June 2015.</td>
<td>Reflect on their understanding of how services should be provided to deliver more humanistic health services.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Esin Cetinkaya-Uşlusoy, Eylem Paslı-Gu’rdogan, Ayse Aydını [21] 2015 Turkey</td>
<td>Professional values of Turkish nurses: A descriptive study</td>
<td>A descriptive study of a convenience sample consisting of 269 clinical nurses.</td>
<td>This study revealed that human dignity is nurses’ most important professional value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Haddy Tunkara Bah, Jainaba Sey-Sawo [22] 2018 Gambia</td>
<td>Teaching and practicing nursing code of ethics and values in the Gambia</td>
<td>Descriptive research</td>
<td>The teaching and application of the code of ethics and professional values are still inadequate, negatively impacting the quality of nursing services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS

This literature review consists of fifteen journals in total, in accordance with inclusion and exclusion criteria, and provides an overview of nursing ethics as a foundation for the implementation of nursing practice. Furthermore, this literature review is divided into three sub-chapters that will discuss the understanding of ethics, integrity and moral responsibility, and the importance of codes of ethics in nursing practice.

**Ethical understanding**

Ethics has internal and external dimensions. External ethics is about norms and morals, and internal ethics is guided by personal values that form gradually over time. In care and nursing, external ethical dimensions still seem to have a dominating position, often external ethical norms and rules governing public health practice [1], [16]. Yet external ethics alone do not seem to be enough to perform the nursing task. Ethics is not just about good deeds but also about the spirit in which good deeds are done. When we look at ethics as an ethos, there is evidence of movement between the internal and external sides.

**Integrity and moral responsibility**

Integrity and responsibility are at the heart of nursing ethics. The value of honesty in delivering truth, respect, compassion, generosity, loyalty, objectivity, benevolence, and wisdom is a form of responsibility and integrity [7], [23]. Virtue is a valuable personal and professional asset [23]. Nurse responsibility shows that the professional nurse displays performance carefully, and conscientiously and the nurse's activities are reported truthfully [2]. Patients feel confident that responsible nurses have the abilities, knowledge, and expertise relevant to their discipline and work align with the code of ethics [13], [24]. Nurses also should uphold and abide by the ethical principles that guide the nursing profession. [25], [26], [27].

**The importance of nursing codes of ethics in nursing practice**

Every day in nursing practice, situations requiring decisions and actions include ethical dilemmas such as the most common and near-miss mistakes, delegation, end-of-life care, technology use, and burnout in completing these challenges well while contributing to safe, compassionate, and quality care. Nurses are expected to be able to solve ethical problems using a code of ethics. The code of ethics is used not only as justification but also as disciplinary action [28]. Nursing code of ethics as a relevant source in service practice [17]. Nurses must respect patient rights, focus on patients, provide humanistic nursing care, and maintain human dignity [8]. Human dignity represents the essence of nursing care, meaning respect for the inherent value of each individual [29], [21].

**DISCUSSION**

Ethics ontologically suggests that ethics is actually about ethos. Ethos is formed through culture and history, a fusion of internal and external ethics. Ethics is not just about good
deeds but also about the spirit in which good deeds are done [1]. Internal ethics are individual characteristics such as conscience, positive energy related to others, self-control skills in conflict situations, the ability to communicate with patients and other health professionals, and responsibility for their duties [2],[11]. For example, when a nurse is face-to-face with a patient, the nurse must be compassionate and intuitive when doing "patient reading" and thinking about which ethical approach is suitable for that patient, how I can value their views on health, and how I can best care for the patient. External ethics, such as appropriate, flexible support systems and effective rewards and punishments, can help enhance the ethical experience. Factors of educational and cultural development rethink behavior, develop a culture that focuses on ethics, and provide specialized practical and theoretical training in ethics [12]. Internal and external ethics are fundamentally different. In the end, internal ethics become more dominant to maintain human dignity [21].

Integrity and responsibility are at the heart of nursing ethics. Nurse responsibility shows that the professional nurse performs carefully and conscientiously and reports the nurse's activities truthfully [2]. Patients feel confident that responsible nurses have knowledge, abilities, and skills relevant to their discipline and are working to align with the code of ethics [13], [14]. [12] Stressing that students who want to enter the nursing profession must be cognitively examined, their thinking skills in analyzing conflicts, and the ability to communicate with patients and other health professionals. According to Risnawati and Amir [18], The problem that often occurs is interpersonal communication. This is important because the health care system requires nurses who can thrive in their relationships with multidisciplinary professionals. Poor interpersonal communication relationships will impact improving ethics [15].

Problems with adherence to the code of ethics also reveal that nurses are incompetent concerning the practice and application of the code of ethics [30], [31]. Nursing ethics can serve as a valuable framework for nursing [5]. Nursing ethics reflects their understanding of how services should be provided in providing more humanistic healthcare [20], [16]. Humanistic nursing service is demonstrated by nurses who view patients as friends, let patients talk, and invite them to engage in their care. Nurses have the time and willingness to see and listen to patients [32], [19].

Nursing services are an integral part of health services based on science, and nursing must carry out its duties following the nursing code of ethics. Code of ethics assessments emphasize nurses' responsibilities in providing for patient needs, an environment in which values, beliefs, human rights, and dignity are respected, and nurses must understand and apply nursing codes of ethics to guide behavior. To this day, codes of ethics are considered an essential part of the nurse ethics knowledge base throughout the nursing world [20]. Nurses must maintain behavior with patients and then communicate well with health workers, which can lead to the application of professional ethics [2], [33]. A code of ethics that does not work will have
an impact on the quality of service [22]. Therefore, nursing ethics is the ethics that nurses use and embody when performing their actions committed to quality nursing care [34], [35].

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTH

The study was not without its limitations. A broad view is important to get as much depth of the topic as possible. The study was limited by the lack of representation from some countries, which may have different perspectives due to workplace and cultural differences.

The strength of this research is that it is necessary to create or add lessons on understanding the nursing code of ethics in the educational curriculum and hospitals so that in-house training schedules can be made for nurses to increase awareness and understanding of the nursing code of ethics. Educators should be able to provide lessons about the nursing code of ethics and provide back that understanding before doing a practicum at work. Nurse practitioners should increase awareness about the importance of the nursing code of ethics through continuous learning from in-house training and related seminars.

IMPLICATIONS

Our research can be used as input in patient care services for nursing sessions and discussions with other health workers when explaining nursing ethics as a cornerstone in nursing practice. This provides more diverse research results and more exposure to participants with different backgrounds to give an overview.

CONCLUSION

Ethics is not just about good deeds but also about the spirit in which good deeds are done. Internal ethics are individual traits such as conscience, positive energy relating to others, self-control skills in conflict situations, and communication skills. Nursing ethics is ethos. Internal ethics dominate to maintain the dignity of the patient. Internal and external ethics are interrelated. Integrity and moral responsibility are at the heart of nursing ethics. Nurses must have an understanding of ethics for self-development and nursing services. The nursing code of ethics as a framework and relevant source refers to the system of rules and principles to realize its responsibility to society. Applying the code of ethics in nursing practice impacts improving the quality of nursing care and service to guarantee patient safety.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank all the subjects involved in this research and all the supervisors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest has been declared by any authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Each author significantly contributed to the following aspects of the paper: (1)
formulating and planning the study, (2) providing their final approval for the submitted version and thoroughly reviewing the article's content, (3) reviewing the article's content, and (4) reviewing the article's content.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

No ethics approval is required as this is an Article Review.

REFERENCES


