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## Knowledge and attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing among nurses in a tertiary care teaching hospital, Nepal

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Health care laws and ethics serve as a hallmark in maintaining the equilibrium in the delivery of health care services. The study aimed to find out the knowledge and attitude regarding the legal and ethical aspects of nursing.

**Method:** A cross-sectional study was conducted in Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Nepal, from July to August 2017. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to find out knowledge and attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing and relation to the demographics- age, an academic qualification in nursing, year of experiences, designation, and place of work in different departments of the hospital. Ethical approval was obtained. Data were analyzed using SPSS, Chi-square test, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the association.

**Result:** Findings revealed that among 200 nurses, 26.0% had good knowledge (score >75%), 62.0% average knowledge (score 50%-75%) and 12.0% poor knowledge (score <50%) regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing. Similarly, 64.5% of nurses had a favourable attitude (score >50%) while 35.5% had an unfavourable attitude on legal and ethical aspects. Knowledge and attitude had no statistically significant association with demographic variables.

**Conclusion:** Most of the nurses had an average level of knowledge and more than half of them had a favourable attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects of nursing.

**Keywords:** attitude, ethical aspects, knowledge, legal aspects

## Introduction

Legal aspects in nursing has standards which guide a nurse to conduct herself properly and to carry out actions that are appropriate and safe for the patient.<sup>1</sup> The Code of Ethics for Nurses is a guide for carrying out nursing responsibilities in a manner consistent with the quality of nursing care and ethical obligations of the profession.<sup>2</sup> Ethics deal with standards of conduct and moral judgment requires to make ethical decisions during patient care.<sup>3</sup> The best way to practice nursing effectively is to be knowledgeable about the science and art of nursing coupled with sound knowledge of laws that establish, control, and promote the nursing practice.<sup>4,5</sup> Majority of participants (69.7%) had an average level of knowledge, 19% had adequate knowledge and only 11.3% had poor knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in nursing among selected nurses working in the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Center, Nepal, which emphasizes the need to be updated with present knowledge on ethical and legal aspects of patient care.<sup>6</sup>

The objective of this study was to find out the level of knowledge and attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing among nurses of Patan Hospital, Nepal.

## Method

A cross-sectional study was conducted at Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS), Lagankhel, Lalitpur, Nepal, from 21 July to 18 August 2017. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. The sample size was 200 including a 10% non-response rate.

A structured self-administered questionnaire was developed by the researcher after the literature review and finalized following consultation with the advisor. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions divided into three parts. Part I consists of a questionnaire related to socio-demographic characteristics of the nurses which include

age, academic qualification in nursing, year of experiences, designation, and place of work. Part II consists of a questionnaire related to knowledge regarding the legal and ethical aspects of nursing. The score of knowledge on legal and ethical aspects was categorized as good (75-100%), average (50-74%), and Poor (<50%).<sup>7</sup> Part III consists of lists of ten statements regarding the attitude that will be measured by scoring in a tool which has a 5-point Likert scale. This was used to represent, 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Uncertain), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly Agree). The total score was 50. The score for attitudes on legal and ethical aspects was categorized as unfavourable (0-50%) and favourable (51-100%).<sup>8</sup> Content validity of the instrument was established by literature review, consultation with the research advisor, statistician, and three subject experts (>80% rating score for content validity). Reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha for attitude related statements which gave a satisfactory value of 0.657.<sup>9</sup>

The ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Tribhuvan University, Institute of Medicine and Institutional Review Committee, Patan Academy of Health Science. The written informed consent was obtained from each nurse before data collection. The information given by respondents was kept confidential by using the findings for study purposes only. Anonymity was maintained by giving code number instead of the nurse's name.

Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 23. Analysis and interpretation of the findings were done by descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation). Inferential statistics (Chi-square test, and Pearson correlation coefficient) were used to determine the association between the knowledge and attitude of nurses regarding the legal and ethical aspects of nursing.

## Result

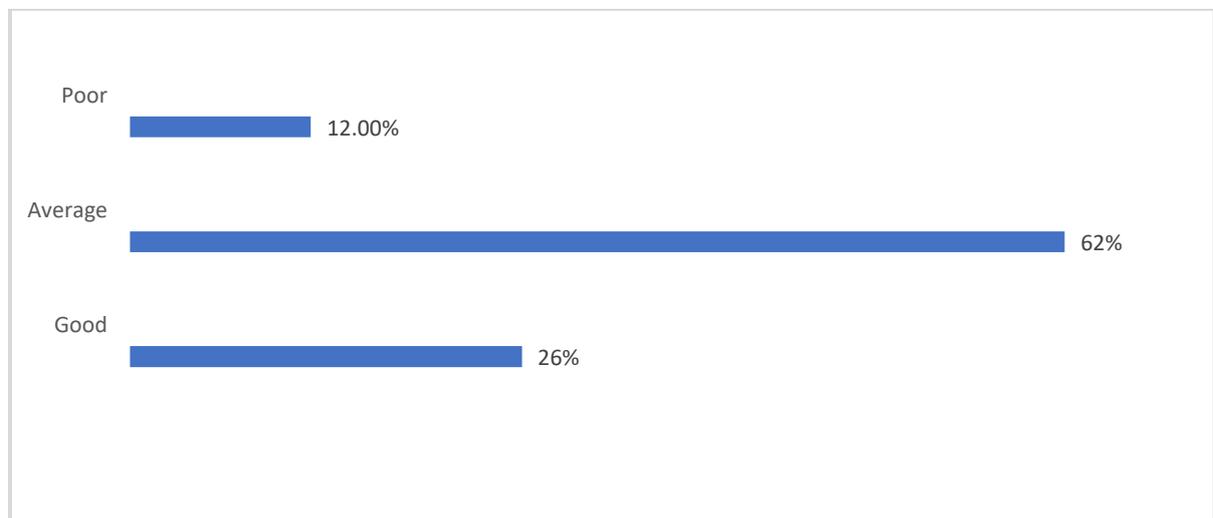
In this study, among 200 nurses majority of nurses, (62.0%) had average knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in nursing while 26.0% had good knowledge and only 12.0% had poor knowledge and among which more than half (64.5%) had a favourable attitude on legal and ethical aspects in nursing. Regarding demographic information, 139(69.5%) belonged to the age group 20-30 years, 106(53.0%) had completed Bachelor level in nursing education. Furthermore, 169(84.5%) are in the designation of staff nurse. Concerning years of work experience, nearly half of the nurses 103(51.5%) have experienced between 6-10 years. Regarding the present area of work, 70(35.0%) respondents were working in the general wards of Patan Hospital.

The total mean score on the Knowledge regarding Nepal Nursing Council (NNC) act was  $61.4 \pm 19.3$  and on Consumer's protection act was  $72.3 \pm 43.9$ . Likewise, the mean score

for knowledge on Nursing documentation, Ethical Principles, and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics/ NNC code of conduct were  $72.3 \pm 6.6$ ,  $48.9 \pm 6.0$ ,  $58.9 \pm 18.6$  respectively, Table 1. The mean score of overall knowledge was  $12.6 \pm 2.6$  with a range of 15, Figure 1. There was a statistically significant association between the present area of work and the level of knowledge (CI: 95%,  $P=0.03$ ). However, there was no statistically significant association between other selected variables (age, an academic qualification in nursing, designation, and year of work experiences), Table 2. Overall, the favourable and unfavourable attitude among nurses was 129 (64.5%) and 71 (35.5%) respectively, Figure 2. Shows the Overall attitude with mean score  $\pm$ SD=  $70.8 \pm 8.7$  with range of 36, Table 3. There was statistically significant correlation with knowledge and attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing at 95% confidence interval with ( $p= 0.003$ ,  $r=-0.210$ ).

**Table 1. Mean knowledge score of legal and ethical aspects of nursing among nurses at Patan Hospital, Nepal, N=200**

Characteristics	Mean	SD
Nepal Nursing Council act	61.4	19.3
Consumer's protection act	72.3	43.9
Nursing documentation	72.3	6.6
Ethical principles	48.9	6.0
International Council of nurses code of ethics/ International Council of nurses code of conduct	58.9	18.6

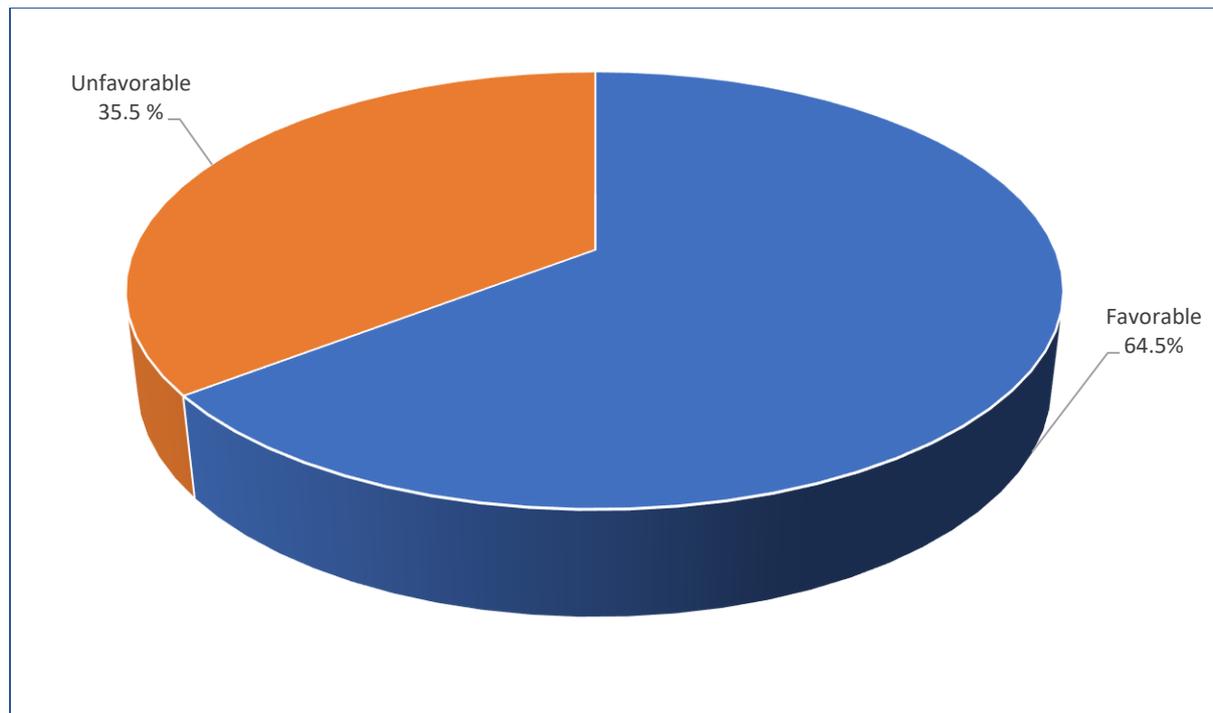


**Figure 1. The overall level of knowledge score of legal and ethical aspects of nursing among nurses at Patan Hospital, Nepal, N=200**

**Table 2. Association of demographics and knowledge score of legal and ethical aspects of nursing among nurses at Patan Hospital, Nepal, N=200**

Characteristics	Level of knowledge			X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	Poor Knowledge	Average Knowledge	Good Knowledge		
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)		
Age- y				4.70	0.96
20-30	20(14.4%)	88(63.3%)	31(22.3%)		
≥30	4(6.6%)	36(59.2%)	21(34.4%)		
Academic qualification				0.64	0.73
Proficiency certificate level	12(12.8%)	60(63.8%)	22(23.4%)		
nursing					
Bachelor level Nursing	12(11.3%)	64(60.4%)	30(28.3%)		
Designation				2.09	0.35
Staff nurse	19(11.4%)	103(70.0%)	47(27.8%)		
Senior nurse & Ward in charge	5(16.1%)	21(67.8%)	5(16.1%)		
Work experiences				1.75	0.42
<10 y	18(11.0%)	105(64.2%)	41(25.0%)		
11 years and above	6(16.7%)	19(52.8%)	11(30.6%)		
Area of work				7.22	0.03*
General wards	13(18.6%)	45(64.3%)	12(17.1%)		
Specialized wards**	11(8.5%)	79(60.8%)	40(30.8%)		

Note: \*p value significant at (p<0.05), \*\*Intensive care units, Emergency, Operation theatre, gynae/obs



**Figure 2. Overall attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing among nurses (N=200) working at Patan Hospital, Nepal**

**Table 3. Association between Knowledge and Attitude of nurses ( N= 200) regarding legal and ethical aspects in nursing**

Pearson Correlation		
	Knowledge	Attitude
Knowledge	1	-0.210*
Attitude	- 0.210*	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

### Discussion

In this study, the majority of nurses (62.0%) had average knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in nursing while 26.0% had good knowledge and only 12.0% had poor knowledge. The reason for an average and good level of knowledge among nurses might be due to their academic qualification in nursing as well as their length of nursing practice whereby the majority of them have work experience between 6-10 years. This is supported by the study conducted in Nepal, where 45% had adequate knowledge while the rest of them had inadequate knowledge regarding nursing ethics; over half of the respondents (53.0%) had adequate knowledge of nursing law while 46% had inadequate knowledge of it.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the finding of another study conducted among nurses at a tertiary care hospital in rural India showed that the majority (78%) of the participants had inadequate knowledge regarding law and ethics in Nursing.<sup>11</sup>

In this study, the majority of nurses (87% PCL nursing and 89.0% Bsc Nursing/ PBBN/ BNS) gained knowledge for legal and ethical aspects was from their nursing courses and through the act and code of ethics established by the regulatory bodies for nursing in Nepal, which is similar to the study conducted in Nepal where 90 % of the nurses preferred journals and books on ethics as the instruments for learning.<sup>12,13</sup> Legal and ethical issues are important to determine whether nurses have appropriately performed duties and whether the duties are performed within the standards of care.<sup>14</sup> It was also found that the nurses haven't faced legal problems themselves (81.0%) or by colleagues (82.5%), even though there is a rise in legal issues and workplace violence in Nepal.<sup>15</sup>

In the present study, the findings on attitude regarding legal and ethical aspects show that among 200 nurses, 71(35.5%) had unfavourable attitudes while 129(64.5%) had a favourable attitude. This is similar to a study that showed (50.8%) of respondents had favorable and 60 (49.2%) had an unfavorable level of attitude regarding patients right.<sup>16</sup>

There was no statistically significant association between the level of knowledge and selected variables (age, an academic qualification in nursing, designation, and year of work experiences) which was similar to the study conducted at Sree Gokulam Medical College and Hospital, Venjaramoodu Trivandrum, Kerala, India.<sup>17</sup> In contrast with this, another study conducted in India, showed a significant association between knowledge level and variables (age, gender, professional qualification, and experience).<sup>18</sup> In this study, Nurses working in general wards have a good level of knowledge than those working in specialized wards which is similar to the study Conducted in the Tertiary Care Hospital of Eastern Nepal.<sup>19</sup>

Legal documents used by nurses is the evidence in a court of law or a professional conduct proceeding in nursing and any violation in the law is liable for punishment.<sup>20,21</sup>

### Conclusion

The majority of nurses had an average level of knowledge (62.0%) regarding legal and ethical aspects of nursing and most of them had a favorable (64.5%) attitude regarding the belief that 'legal and ethical aspects are important for nurses.

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## Conflict of Interest

None

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Supplement

**Questionnaire**

**Part I**

**Socio-Demographic Information**

**Direction:** Please tick (✓) on the correct answer or answers in the space provided.

Code Number.....

1. Age (in years):..... completed years
2. Academic qualifications in Nursing
  - a. PCL Nursing
  - b. B.sc Nursing / PBBN/ BNS
  - c. Masters in Nursing
3. Designation
  - a. Staff nurse
  - b. Senior nurse
  - c. Ward in-charge
  - d. Supervisor
4. Years of work experiences
  - a. Below 5 years
  - b. 6 - 10 years
  - c. 11- 15 years
  - d. 16 years and Above
5. The present area of work .....ward/ Department

**PART II**

**Knowledge regarding Legal aspects**

**Direction:** Please tick (✓) on the correct answer or answers in the space provided.

6. Where did you get information about the legal aspects of nursing?
  - a. During nursing education/ course
  - b. Conferences/ workshops
  - c. During nursing practice
  - d. Self-Study
  - e. Mass media
7. Have you ever faced any legal problems?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No.
  - If yes, please specify.....
8. Have you ever seen any legal problems faced by your colleagues during nursing practice?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No.
  - If yes, please specify.....
9. Nepal Nursing Council act was established on .....
  - a. 2056 B.S.
  - b. 2042 B.S
  - c. 2052 B.S.
  - d. 2022 B.S.
10. According to the Nepal Nursing Council act of Nepal "Nursing professionals" means a nurse, midwife, and ANM.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
11. If a nurse (he/ she) has become insane (mentally ill and couldn't perform his/her daily activities) the deletion of name from the register occurs.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
12. For the renewal of the name of a registered nursing professional required documents to be submitted within .....days after the date of expiration of the time limit.
  - a. Ninety
  - b. Thirty
  - c. Thirty-five
  - d. Sixty
13. Doctors and nurses should refuse to treat a violent patient.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
14. Patients have the right to refuse or stop the treatment.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
15. In the emergency department Patient A is dyspnoeic and is the referred case from Dhading district, at the same time Patient B arrived with a clean-cut injury in his thumb, who is the son of the Managing director of that hospital. Patient B should be treated as soon as possible without delay.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
16. A patient has a right to use complaints and lawsuits if his/her rights will be violated.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
17. A minor (below 18 years) can give consent for procedures other than a major operation.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
18. Documentation of the patient's general condition is done .....

- a. Only in deterioration states.
  - b. To record and report each activity and every shift
  - c. While performing any special procedures
  - d. While vital sign gets altered
19. The nursing report must be signed.....
- a. In the same line where space is provided for signature.
  - b. In the same line with different colour pen/ pencil where space is provided for signature.
  - c. By giving a space a line below the report ended
  - d. No need to signed for every report.
20. What is the appropriate time to do a signature in the medication cardex?
- a. While administering medication
  - b. After prescribed by a physician
  - c. After administering medication
  - d. Before leaving duty

**Knowledge regarding ethical aspects**

21. Where did you get information about the ethical aspects of nursing?
- a. During nursing education/ course
  - b. Conferences/ workshops
  - c. During nursing practice
  - d. Self-Study
  - e. Mass media
22. Have you ever faced any ethical problems?
- a. Yes
  - b. No.
- If yes, please specify.....
23. Have you ever seen any ethical problems faced by your colleagues during nursing practice?
- a. Yes
  - b. No.
- If yes, please specify.....
24. Ethics refers to
- a. Sets of moral values
  - b. Set of belief
  - c. Set of judgment
  - d. Set of laws
25. Which of the following is not the principal element that outlines the standards of ethical conduct in the International Council of Nurses (ICN )code of ethics for nurses?
- a. Nurses and people
  - b. Nurses and place
  - c. Nurses and practice
  - d. Nurses and profession
26. "If you are doing no harm in the beneficent act of using technology to extend life or in using tested drugs" is in the ethical principle of.....
- a. Justice
  - b. Veracity
  - c. Nonmaleficence
  - d. Autonomy
27. An elderly patient falls at home and has a fractured hip. In the emergency room, the nurse provides needful care and medication as per physician order as soon as possible is an act of
- a. Nonmaleficence
  - b. Fidelity
  - c. Beneficence
  - d. Autonomy
28. A tertiary level hospital wishes to donate free dental services for 45 children per week to the community. The method to choose the patients that are free of bias to receive service on the ethical principle of
- a. Autonomy
  - b. Justice
  - c. Veracity
  - d. Fidelity
29. A male patient came in an emergency with the diagnosis of acute exacerbation of COPD and is conscious have the right to decide whether to do ABG analysis or not falls in the ethical principle of

- a. Autonomy
  - b. Justice
  - c. Veracity
  - d. Fidelity
30. The nurses haven't the right to use judgment regarding individual competence when accepting and delegating responsibility.
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know

**PART III**

**Attitude regarding Legal and ethical aspects in nursing**

**Instructions:** The following items are not designed to test your knowledge. Instead, you are meant to explore some of your views and opinion towards legal and ethical aspects. Kindly respond to any of the columns against each of the following statement:

**Strongly agree: SA, Disagree: D, Agree: A, Strongly disagree: SD, Undecided: U**

S.N.	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	A nurse who is punished by a court for a criminal offense in her personal matter is disqualified for a nursing license.					
2.	Do not resuscitate (DNR) decision includes client and family in decision making.					
3.	Written consent is obtained only for major procedures including operations, not for nursing procedures.					
4.	Spelling errors of drugs in writing nursing reports refer to mistake in the documentation.					
5.	The Handover/Takeover book must be maintained with the signature of nurses who takes/ gives handover/ takeover.					
6.	Ethics as part of a syllabus should be taught in every medical/nursing teaching institution.					
7.	Code of ethics is broader and more universal than laws but cannot override laws.					
8.	Nurses shall disclose any information to the authentic person known to her about the patient's condition.					
9.	Every nurse is responsible/ accountable for any activities performed by her regarding nursing care of the patient in their duty hour.					
10.	Financial benefits shall not be received by making an advertisement of her profession except for remuneration, allowances, and institutional facilities.					

**THANK YOU!!**