The significance of nurses' professional ideals in the COVID-19 crisis

Mudhir mubarak alhassenh,mubarak mesfer alore,abdulrahman saad alfawaz,ahmed hassan alrashidi,norah mohammed saeed,maha mohammed al jubran,abdulmalek khalifa alsultan,faisal hamad alsulaiman,hussain eissa mohammed al-eissa,khalid ibrahim sultan albargi,abdullah batel alshammari,naif farhan alfaifi,shaeya muhammad mater al-shammari,ali mohammad ali alismael

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted nurses' professional quality of life, with various factors affecting their psychological stress. Nurses play a crucial role in healthcare, providing vital care to patients, families, and caregivers. They adapt to meet the needs of hospitals, society, and communities, participating in policy-making procedures, and material supply management. Nurses worldwide exhibit kindness, care, courage, morals, and professional responsibility. They must adhere to rules, regulations, ethics, and standards, balancing care with self-care when working with COVID-19 patients. Nurse leaders are essential in preventing and controlling infections, establishing worldwide networks, and diagnosing infectious diseases.

Keywords: Role of the Nurse, Covid-19, Pandemic, Professional Responsibility.

INTRODUCTION:

"The World Health Organization (WHO), the American Nurses Association (ANA), and other healthcare organizations stated that nurses play a crucial role in a pandemic from the very beginning, even before a disease has a chance to spread widely."¹ A full lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic involves the mandatory closure of schools, colleges, institutions, markets, and workplaces to prevent and safeguard the health of the population. All were urged to stay at home unless it is necessary to leave for essential purchases. Healthcare providers must fulfill their responsibilities to assist vulnerable and needy individuals. Nurses are the primary healthcare workers responsible for providing care during health crises.² Nurses play crucial roles in managing COVID-19 patients by conducting screenings, implementing triage, providing care, communicating with caregivers, offering health education on coronavirus prevention, protection, and managing critical conditions. The 2019 annual report by the WHO stated that the world is not sufficiently prepared for a global health crisis. The WHO stated that due to the unexpected nature of pandemic breakouts, global health agencies must create plans to ensure suitable and prompt responses.³,⁴ The group
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stated that the nurses must be included in the planning process. Nurses worldwide are taking up duties to help in the coronavirus response.

The UK government is contemplating returning recently retired nurses and other healthcare personnel. The Association of Camp Nursing released official standards for spring break camps, which include the monitoring of children and staff for illnesses by camp administrators and nurses. The Washington State Nurses Association is urging local and state leaders to enhance the protection of staff nurses caring for sick patients.

Values are a highly intriguing area of investigation. Values serve as guiding principles for ethical behavior, as ethics is closely linked to values across all cultures, including therapeutic settings. Professional values in nursing are standards of behavior that professionals adhere to, influencing their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Nursing professional values influence clinical practice in a professional and ethical manner, defining the identity of nurses. Values are only present within a specific cultural context that permits their acquisition. Therefore, it is not unexpected that incorporating nursing professional values is a primary obligation of nursing school institutions. Experienced nurses are crucial in passing on information and principles to future generations.

Incorporating professional values into clinical practice is essential in nursing because of the advantages it offers to society, patients, and nurses. Nursing professional values are positively associated with the satisfaction obtained from delivering care, a component of professional quality of life (ProQOL) called compassion fulfillment. This, in turn, enhances the quality of clinical care and nurses' job satisfaction. The ongoing pandemic has led to increased job demands and elevated stress levels among nurses, resulting in high rates of burnout and compassion fatigue. Amidst the work overload experienced by nurses, it is intriguing to explore if the 2019 new coronavirus (COVID-19) health crisis has impacted the connection between professional values and ProQOL, particularly in high-stress environments.

The COVID-19 outbreak originating in Wuhan, China, resulted in an unprecedented global pandemic. The epidemic has rapidly spread worldwide. Spain has had a high number of COVID-19 cases with a significant proportion resulting in fatalities. The health crisis has had a significant impact, pushing our public health system's response capacity to its limits. Since the crisis began, health workers have encountered psychosocial risk factors that may result in psychological distress. Nurses have experienced significant stress throughout the pandemic.
because to the lack of a targeted COVID-19 therapy, the serious consequences it causes in patients, and the increased workload. During the crisis, healthcare workers must deliver healthcare services while facing significant ethical dilemmas, which heightens their felt stress. ProQOL is adversely impacted in this intricate scenario. ProQOL encompasses three dimensions: burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. Burnout involves emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal fulfillment at work. Compassion fatigue arises from exposure to the suffering of others in healthcare. Compassion satisfaction is a protective factor experienced when professionals are content with their work in the care relationship. Our research aims to investigate the interrelationships among perceived stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and nursing professional values during the current health crisis. Reduce in-person interactions with patients whenever feasible.

To mitigate risks, it is advisable to utilize personal protective equipment when handling positive cases and practice regular handwashing. It involves changing out of work clothes before entering the home and showering immediately upon arrival. If necessary, distancing yourself from family members to safeguard them to the best of their ability. Maintaining proper hygiene is a crucial aspect in controlling a pandemic. Nurses must adhere to cleanliness rules and procedures due to their frequent and close interaction with patients.

**METHODOLOGY:**
This research aimed to examine the correlations among nursing professional values, felt stress, and the ProQOL during the COVID-19 crisis. Registered Nurses were selected for this study using a convenience sampling method. To be eligible, participants had to be at least 18 years old, employed as a nurse in the public health sector of the Principality of Asturias (Spain), and working continuously during the second wave of the pandemic in Spain (September–December 2020). Participants were excluded if they had experienced temporary absence from work owing to illness (mental or physical) or accident between September and December 2020. Data was gathered online using a custom-designed Google Forms questionnaire, which included scales and a socio-demographic survey. We collaborated with the Professional Nursing College of the Principality of Asturias for the recruitment process. The university posted details about the research study on its website along with a link to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was accessible from December 2 to December 24, 2020, coinciding with the decline of the second wave of the pandemic in Asturias.
Analysis: The statistical analysis was conducted using the SPSS program version 24.0. We presented the descriptive statistics of socio-demographic and employment factors using frequencies and percentages. Perceived stress differences between frontline and non-frontline professionals were analyzed using the Student's t-test for mean differences. We conduct a descriptive analysis of stress levels, burnout, and compassion fatigue, categorizing them into three severity levels (low/medium/high) based on specific cut-off points. Percentages and total frequencies were computed according to gender and high/low exposure to COVID-19 patients. The effect magnitude was determined using Cohen’s d. We computed the means and standard deviations (SDs) for the three groups of professional experience (less than 10 years, 11 to 20 years, and more than 20 years) across the three dimensions of professional values, using the scores as a quantitative variable. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there were significant distinctions among the three professional experience categories, and the effect size was measured using eta-squared. A Pearson correlation was conducted to analyze the relationship between professional values, ProQOL, and felt stress, while distinguishing between frontline and non-frontline nurses. Statistically significant values were those below 0.05 for p.21

RESULTS

There was a moderate negative association between perceived stress and compassion satisfaction in both groups. This suggests that higher stress levels are associated with poorer satisfaction in the helping relationship, whereas higher levels of compassion fulfillment are linked to lower stress levels. Perceived stress and burnout had a moderate to high positive association in both groups. Compassion satisfaction and burnout displayed a negative moderated connection, suggesting that compassion satisfaction acts as a protective factor against burnout. This relationship was also noted between compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue in both groups. Burnout and compassion fatigue were strongly correlated in both frontline and non-frontline nurses.

We discovered moderate associations between the three components (mastery, expertise, and ethics) of nursing professional ideals and compassion satisfaction. The link was stronger among non-frontline nurses and weaker among frontline nurses, indicating a drop in correlation for professionals under severe stress. Correlations between nursing professional values and
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compassion fatigue were minimal in frontline practitioners and absent in non-frontline professionals. We discovered moderate to high correlations among the three aspects of nursing professional values, with a particularly strong association between expertise and mastery.

DISCUSSION:
This study aimed to investigate how professional values impact the perceived stress and ProQOL of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is the first to focus on these relationships during a health crisis, as far as we know. The study aimed to investigate how professional values could impact the reported stress and several variables of ProQOL (burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction) among nurses during the health crisis. Coping with stressful situations caused by significant job overload is a process that relies on the environment and various other aspects.

Nurses in direct touch with patients experience higher levels of emotional weariness and depersonalization, which can result in burnout. Studies conducted during the peak of the first wave of the pandemic found that nurses caring for COVID-19 patients experienced moderate to high levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, and perceived stress. Our findings show comparable levels of stress and compassion fatigue among nurses during the first and second waves of the pandemic in Spain, but significantly higher levels of burnout. The proportion of professionals experiencing high burnout, as identified using the ProQOL, increased from 36% in April 2011 to 87% in our research conducted in December 2020. We are encountering a significant issue among health professionals that impacts between 40% and 75% of them.

Studies on nursing professional values in our region found that ethics received the highest marks, followed by professional mastery, with expertise being rated the lowest. Our results validated the hierarchy of priority, once again highlighting the paramount significance of ethical ideals. Ethics is related to values, and the concept of values is connected to humanistic models developed by influential authors like Maslow. These theories have impacted nursing approaches that prioritize needs and play a significant role in the field of nursing. Nurses greatly regard ethical principles such as equity, equality, freedom, tolerance, justice, and the unwavering preservation of human dignity. Values, particularly ethical ones, provide profound guidance and the lack of them dehumanizes individuals. Values are crucial for humanizing nursing care.
Our findings indicate a weak negative association between ethics, professional expertise, and stress, which is not significant enough to draw any useful conclusions. The discovery about the correlation between professional ideals and compassion fulfillment during the health crisis is intriguing and aligns with another research. Qualitative research through in-depth interviews revealed a strong correlation between compassion fulfillment and all aspects of professional ideals. Kim and colleagues demonstrated that being conscious of professional values had a beneficial effect on nurses' Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL), particularly in terms of their compassion satisfaction. A study conducted among nurses before the COVID-19 crisis indicated a strong relationship between professional values and compassion satisfaction \((r = 0.56)\). We found moderate relationships between the three characteristics of professional values and compassion satisfaction. However, this correlation was slightly smaller among frontline professionals. In nurses more exposed to COVID-19 patients, there were positive associations between Expertise and Ethics and compassion fatigue. However, these correlations were absent in non-frontline nurses. This outcome among novice nurses could be understood in relation to the psychological role of values. Nurses who prioritize professional values are more likely to recognize the discrepancy between the healthcare being delivered during times of work overload caused by a health crisis and the ideal standard of healthcare. This increased awareness may lead to greater stress and heightened feelings of compassion fatigue in nurses. Furthermore, we noticed that the relationships between the three categories of professional values and compassion satisfaction are reduced in frontline nurses. As perceived stress levels rise, the relationship between professional values and compassion fulfillment declines. During the health crisis, the nursing professional values that help with compassion satisfaction may be somewhat diminished due to the increased workload. Our results demonstrate that professional values continue to have a favorable impact on helping others, even in high-stress and overloaded work environments. It is crucial because the positive emotion caregivers experience from giving care, known as compassion satisfaction, enhances the standard of clinical treatment for patients, thereby boosting nurses' job satisfaction.\(^9\) We believe that the relationship between compassion fulfillment and nursing professional ideals may be dynamic and bidirectional. Nurses who provide care to patients based on nursing professional values experience compassion fulfillment, which in turn reinforces these values as guiding principles for future actions that result in positive outcomes. Strengthening compassion satisfaction could help avoid burnout, as indicated by the discovery of a moderated negative association between compassion satisfaction and burnout. This aligns with prior studies indicating that enhancing nursing
professional values through specific interventions might lead to increased compassion satisfaction and reduced burnout. Professional values are crucial for professional identity, quality of care, patient and professional satisfaction, and can also impact nurses’ mental health by enhancing compassion satisfaction and reducing the risk of mental health issues associated with compassion fatigue or burnout.\textsuperscript{11} This finding is significant because the majority of nurses are female (87.2\% of the sample), which suggests a higher likelihood of mental health issues such as anxiety or depression due to stress. This vulnerability may be heightened during the health crisis, particularly for professionals in direct contact with COVID-19 patients.\textsuperscript{28,29}

Our data suggest that nursing professional values act as a protective factor for compassion fulfillment, hence decreasing the likelihood of compassion fatigue and burnout even in times of health crisis. Consequently, these principles enable nurses to deliver superior care to patients by upholding elevated levels of compassion satisfaction. Values serve as a context of meaning for the choices and behaviors made by nurses moment by moment.

Our findings have significant consequences. Some writers have suggested the importance of implementing preventive techniques for burnout and compassion fatigue in healthcare professionals. Nursing professional values could be the solution to this issue in the nursing profession due to their positive impact on compassion satisfaction. It is crucial to emphasize professional values to nursing students, highlighting their significance in professional practice. Nursing professional values are primarily influenced by the training acquired at the university, as seen by the lack of notable variances among varying degrees of clinical experience. Values are acquired within a community setting. This community has to strengthen these values by exemplifying and advocating for them effectively in order to educate more skilled and capable professionals to handle challenging situations, like as the current epidemic. Values need to be fully incorporated into nursing education, but the challenge is in ensuring the proper conditions to develop and reinforce those values. Health institutions must ensure conditions that promote the adoption, preservation, or enhancement of values, particularly as experienced practitioners may be prone to a decline in these values with time.\textsuperscript{8} We need to enhance nursing professional values in every educational and clinical setting. We will attain exceptional care at both the human and scientific-technical levels, leading to more resilient professionals for the future.

\textbf{LIMITATIONS}

It is crucial to highlight certain constraints. We need to analyze the non-probabilistic sampling
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method employed. This sampling method does not ensure that the participants are a true representation of all professionals within the examined group, including frontline nurses and those engaged in other activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The voluntary nature of this study and the crisis backdrop could have caused a response bias if non-participants were too stressed to reply. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the majority of the sample consists of women (87.2%), and this gender disparity, although common in the nursing field, should be acknowledged as a restriction. We need to acknowledge the potential bias of acquiescence in the significance attributed to various professional values. Assessing individuals over the age of 60 with online questionnaires may deter participation due to their potential lack of familiarity with modern technologies. Another constraint is the utilization of a cross-sectional design. Longitudinal investigations are required to capture the dynamic effects and fluctuations of the pandemic not apparent in this research. Therefore, our results should be approached with caution, particularly in terms of their generalizability.

CONCLUSION

Nursing professional values had a favorable impact on the level of compassion satisfaction experienced by nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. High levels of compassion satisfaction decrease the likelihood of experiencing compassion fatigue and burnout. Frontline practitioners who have frequent contact with COVID-19 patients experience elevated levels of felt stress, leading to a decrease in the association between their professional values and compassion fulfillment. As perceived stress levels rise, the ability of nursing professional values to protect satisfaction in the assisting relationship diminishes. It is essential to strengthen professional values in all settings, particularly through comprehensive and in-depth learning during university education, in order to produce nurses who are more fulfilled and professionals who are more resilient for the future.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses will maintain a cheerful attitude and actively engage in all patient care activities. They should continuously acquire knowledge and put into practice infection control measures, new policies, procedures, and oversee supply and isolation units. Nurses are crucial in managing COVID-19 patients and meeting the objectives of the healthcare system. They not only provide nursing care but also coordinate and communicate with family members and other healthcare providers to achieve the goals of COVID-19 patients.
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