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# VIOLATION OF PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR TOWARDS NURSES IN PAKISTAN: AN ETHICAL VIOLATION IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

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## Abstract

Professional behavior violation is a ravaging issue worldwide. Incidents of violation of professionalism toward nurses are common in every healthcare setting either in public or in private sectors. Nurses are more vulnerable to workspace violence due to the nature of the job and tasks performed by them in healthcare settings. Lack of respect towards the nursing profession in Pakistani society is a significant contributing factor in violation of professional behavior in the workplace toward nurses.

An ethical violation is a conduct that is against the code of ethics and policy of the institute. There are many categories of ethical violation in workplace but the nurses are facing mostly sexual harassment, safety violation, discrimination, professional boundaries violation, abusive and threatening behaviour on daily basis. There are many reported cases in which nurses experience rape, unwanted sexual deeds, workplace bullying, and physical violence from patients, their family members and other paramedical staff which leads to the psychologically and physically detrimental effects on the health as well as on the career of the nurses. Yet nothing specific has been done to control the ethical violation at the healthcare settings in Pakistan. In Pakistan on the basis of the job description and direct contact of the nurses with patients and their family members, many incidents are yet disclosed because of the lack of security and threatening behavior toward the nurses in Pakistani society. There should be a strict penalty for those who are incriminated in any type of delinquency to help out the nurses to get through from the ethical violation efficiently and in a decent way. A protective and respectful work environment will give life to the nursing profession and improve the image of the nurses in healthcare settings.

**Keywords:** Ethical Violation, Healthcare settings, Nursing Profession, Professional Behavior, Pakistan Society

## INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence towards the nurses is defined as “ an incident of hostility that is physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or psychological that occurs when nurses are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work”(1). Moreover, workplace violence has a substantial impact on the financial costs of an organization and an estimated cost in a year could be up to 4.2 billion dollars (2).

Among all healthcare workers, nurses are at greatest risk because they work in a leading position and closely interact with patients, families, doctors and other paramedical staff (3). Furthermore, nurses are disparaged in society due to the nature of the tasks performed by them at healthcare settings such as patients’ bathing, cleaning patients’ vomits, stool and urine, changing clothes, assessing patients’ genitals, and handling their body parts. In Pakistani societies, this nature of work has been contemplated as of lower category. Therefore, nurses are abhorred and are checked out less worthy in these societies; hence they are more prone to work related violence (4).

## CASE REPORT

During the outburst of dengue fever there were many adversities faced by the nurses distinctively as they are more engaged in patient care due to their duty timing and all time interaction with the patient. One of the incidents recently occurred in a tertiary hospital of Punjab. A nurse working in the renowned public sector with 3 years of clinical experience in the public sector and 1 year experience of the private



sector. A nurse visited all the patients in routine as before. One of the protocol patient's family members came to the nursing officer for intravenous cannulation. A nursing officer responded to him and arranged all the accessories required for the intravenous cannulation. When a nursing officer reached the patient's room she became nervous after seeing the family members of the patient which were 12 in numbers i.e. 9 males and 3 females. All were continuously staring at the nurse with a savage gaze. A nurse asked the patient's family members to vacate the room for the procedure and further treatment. But no one left the room. In fact, while performing the cannulation male attendant came close to the nurse and violated the professional boundary. Nurse asked the attendant to stay away from her or she would complain against you. On this patient's family became angry and started shouting and harshly yelled at her, "Call your senior one as our patient is the protocol of some political party. How dare you ask us to leave the room"? They alleged that she was incompetent and rude.

When the senior nurse arrived at the patient's room, 4 male attendants started yelling at her collectively and asked her about her name so they would complain against her through their protocol. And they also threatened her that she would be punished badly. Moreover, they stopped her way to exit and became close to her. One of the attendants grabbed her and tried to harm her. Then the servant approached the incident site after hearing the noise. Nurse complained against them to their higher authorities but no one took any action against them as they belonged to some protocol. And those attendants continuously threatened her during their patient's stay in hospital. This incident affected her psychologically and physically and after this act of harassment she went through with severe depression and lost her confidence and self esteem. She became severely ill and requested her senior to change her unit. Eventually she ended up with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

## **WHY IS WORKPLACE ETHICAL VIOLATION TOWARDS NURSES IN A PAKISTANI SOCIETY IS STILL A BIG QUERY?**

In my opinion ethical violation in professional behavior is one of the most pernicious issues in Pakistan. On the evidence of the previous studies it is concluded that some of the factors are playing an important and contributing role toward the ethical violation of nurses in Pakistan. Pakistan nurses are considered an oppressed group and this discrimination against the profession hinders nurses to get required respect and deliver high quality care in the healthcare setting; hence impacting the overall health status of the nation badly (5).

Rogge & Greenwald (2004) being nursing professionals described their experience of civilized oppression. They defined this oppression as "physical, mental or spiritual distress of another person through the misuse of power or authority". Distressing of individuals is a form of civilized oppression; though the exploitation of individuals is indirect, being more covert and it is difficult to recognize. Unequal power relations between two groups are the main antecedent of civilized oppression. The perspective that one group is dominant and other is subservient is rooted in societal and cultural norms. Consequently, the discrimination, mistreatment and ridicule of subordinates continue. This disrespectful conduct towards subordinates. This disrespectful conduct towards subordinate groups results in negative emotions of shame, separation, self disbelief and even self concept in them. Furthermore, these oppressed individuals may then target others in their group to express their frustration. This behavior is known as horizontal hostility (6).

Secondly, the media has portrayed a very negative image of the nurses in the society such as symbols of sex and obedient servants of physicians. This poor image of the profession shown by the media is another contributing factor for workplace ethical violation towards nurses (7).

Moreover, many supplementary duties were given to nurses, which added to their workload. Regardless of the severe shortage of the nurses many activities like medicine expenses, biomedical equipment expenses, machinery expenses, maintenance of segregation system, patient record maintenance and public health programs such as MNCH (Maternal Neonatal Child Health), IPC (Infection, Prevention and Control), Dengue Fever Control, Polio Eradication Programs were conducted in the departments. This resulted in delayed patients' admissions and patient treatment that caused the aggression of the patients' attendant and destroyed the image of the nursing profession.

## DISCUSSION

Violations of professional behavior towards the nurses are very common in Pakistan. Mostly, incidents related to ethical violation are under-reported due to a feeling of shame and guilt, lack of support from organizations, and lack of a structured system for reporting. Many structural policies and protection mechanisms are not in place securing the safety of nurses working in healthcare settings in Pakistan. Legislative reforms for hospital governance pertaining to a zero tolerance policy for violence and protection from the oppressed groups are needed.

## CONCLUSION

Ethical violation towards nurses in healthcare settings is a consequential issue. The most common issues faced by the nurses were regarding admission procedure, compromised nursing care, dissatisfaction of patients due to inadequate equipment, deficient supply of medicines, uncooperative support staff, stereotypes about nursing profession, professional incompetence of nurses, security issues and undue political interference in their work. Jafree et al., (8). Just like other human beings, nurses have the right to work in a safe and protective environment with full respect and dignity and take autonomous decisions. Literature reveals that the best tool to eliminate workplace ethical violations prevention and give equal rights to all professions. Everyone working in an organization should be informed about workplace ethical violence policies at basic hiring level. Similarly, patients should be informed at admission level about the zero tolerance policy for any ethical violation of professional behavior. Furthermore, every individual has a responsibility to report the incidents of workplace harassment and persecution. Authorities alone cannot take any deliberate action against workplace ethical violation of professional behavior unless and until it is reported by nurses who are the victims working in the healthcare settings. Protective and learning working environment will automatically attract individuals to choose the nursing profession.

### Conflict of Interest:

Author has no conflict of interest.

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