

Evaluating Perception of Ethics and Professionalism amongst Dental Students of Dental Teaching Institute

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Abstract:

Objective

The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of undergraduates and graduates regarding professionalism and ethical guidelines and their application in clinical practices.

Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was opted. For dental undergraduates of clinical year 3rd and 4th and graduates who are either house officers or junior faculty members of public and private dental institutes a pre-validated questionnaire having a Cronbach's alpha value within 0.7 to 0.8 range in a pilot run amongst 15 participants that was then circulated via online media. The questionnaire was comprised of 15 items and a Likert scale was used in the survey with close-ended questions. Data analysis was done through SPSS version 21. For quantitative variables mean and standard deviations were determined.

Results:

According to the data collected and analyzed 50 % of the students and junior dental faculty or fresh dentist opinioned that they do learn ethics and professionalism from their peers and about 50 % of participants look forward to the inclusion of ethics as a subject at the undergraduate level. About 48 % of participants opinioned that after graduation their public speaking skills and ethics of patient handling should be polished through the inclusion of multiple workshops and continuing education programs from the institution.

Conclusion: This study suggests that a curriculum should be designed to develop psychological attributes with the use of effective teaching and learning.

Keywords: Ethics, professionalism, dental curriculum, dental practices.

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BACKGROUND: Ethics, a philosophical examination of moral dilemmas concerning right and wrong,

is integral in dentistry to establish patients' trust by providing careful consideration in treatment presentation,

consent acquisition, and response to patients' choices (1). Dental practice in the 21st century has become ethically intricate, emphasizing a holistic approach beyond mere biological concerns. With rapid advancements in dental technologies, adherence to ethical standards gains heightened importance across various aspects of dental care (2). Given dentistry's significant societal trust, practitioners must uphold ethical norms throughout all procedures, as ethical conduct is a cornerstone expectation of the profession. Professionalism intertwines with ethics, dictating that dental practitioners must align their actions with ethical guidelines while maintaining a professional demeanor (3).

Dentists bear the responsibility of aligning their professional conduct with ethical principles deeply rooted in moral codes (4). Decision-making in dentistry ranges from straightforward to arduous, requiring a thorough exploration of patients' desires, expectations, and concerns regarding dental aesthetics (5). Dentists must inform patients about the long-term

biological implications of invasive procedures, ensuring informed decision-making. However, the prevalence of unnecessary overtreatment raises ethical concerns, contradicting the foundational principles of healing and care within dentistry (6, 7). While numerous studies assess the application of ethical guidelines, there remains a necessity to identify gaps in knowledge or implementation, particularly in dental education. Evaluating these gaps can inform the refinement of teaching methodologies to effectively integrate essential ethics and professionalism education, thereby enhancing dental care delivery in communities.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics and professionalism are important parts of our practice of dentistry, like many other professions, and need to be addressed. Ethical curriculum in dental schools contributes to laying the foundation for our ethical behavior and decision-making process throughout our careers. Dentistry school faculty have a key role to play in guiding and positively influencing students in further developing professional dental ethics (8).

Teaching our dental students that ethical behavior is in their self-interest that is having a good relationship with patients where the patient feels comfortable and trusts their dentist which can give material benefit to the dentist (9). A satisfied, contented, and happy patient can serve as an advocate of dental practice and will refer new patients which is beneficial. Ethics courses should give students the moral courage they need to make informed choices

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when they already know right from wrong and deliver them in a professional manner (10). In 2017 a study was conducted in the UK which stated that dental undergraduates felt adequately prepared for simple clinical procedures and communication skills but when it comes to long-term treatment planning, they lack treatment planning and patient counseling skills (11). If additional training and consolidation emphasizing the need for further evaluation and enhancement of dental education is done the students, then benefit (1)

Similarly, another article was published that addressed the challenges facing dental education and practice up to 2040, emphasizing the need for dental graduates to adapt to changes in oral health, technology, and integrated care (12). Key challenges included shifts in disease prevalence, practice patterns, and cultural competence. It proposed necessary skills such as clinical proficiency, critical thinking, ethical values, and leadership to meet these challenges effectively. The article advocated for collaborative efforts among academic and professional leaders to ensure high standards of care for patients and the public (2, 3, 4)

RATIONALE

To evaluate the perspective of dental students and junior dentists regarding professionalism and ethical guidelines. We can compare the value of ethics with simple life skills like driving a car. To get a driver's license a person must first pass a test including "Rules of the Road".

Similarly, for a dentist to be licensed to practice it is necessary for dental students and graduates to learn and be tested on the technical aspects of procedures and to be informed about professional codes of conduct also known as the "Code of Ethics" (8)

OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of undergraduates and graduates regarding professionalism and ethical guidelines and their application in clinical practices.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was opted for dental undergraduates of clinical years 3rd and 4th and graduates who are either house officers or junior faculty members of public and private dental institutes were taken as the study population. A convenience sampling technique was used. The tabulated sample size was 384 subjects. The study duration was 3 months after getting approval from the institutional review board.

Inclusion criteria include all professional year BDS students, House officers, and those who voluntarily participated in the survey. Exclusion criteria comprised of senior faculty members, post-graduate trainees, and participants who voluntarily withdrew from the study, however, half-filled survey forms were excluded after approval from the IRB committee an online pre-validated questionnaire having a Cronbach's alpha value within

0.7 to 0.8 range in a pilot run amongst 15 participants that was then circulated via online media. The questionnaire was comprised of 15 items and a Likert scale was used in the survey with close-ended questions. Data analysis was done through SPSS version 21. For quantitative variables mean and standard deviations were determined.

RESULTS:

A total of 383 responses were collected completely out of which 276 were female and 107 were male 5.7 % were 2nd-year students, 14.9 % were 3rd-year students, 27.7 % were 4th-year students, and 198 were house officers. According to the data collected and analyzed 50 % of the students and junior dental faculty or fresh dentist opinioned that they do learn ethics and professionalism from their peers and about 50 % of participants look forward to the inclusion of ethics as a subject at the undergraduate level. About 48 % of participants opinioned that after graduation their public speaking skills and ethics of patient handling should be polished through the inclusion of multiple workshops and continued education programs from the institution.

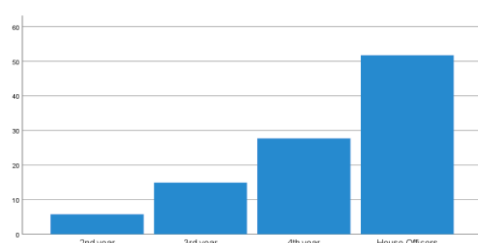


Figure 1-participant's year of study

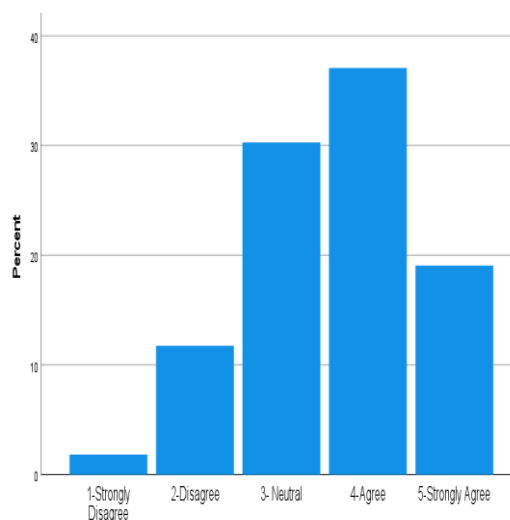


Figure 2 satisfaction related to reinforcement of ethical studies in curriculum

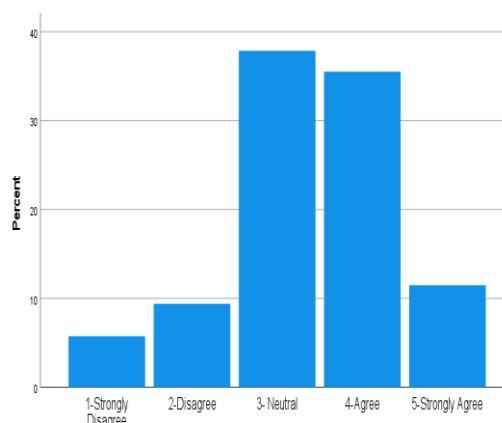


Figure 3-institute promote culture where students are motivated to report unethical behavior they witness among their peers.

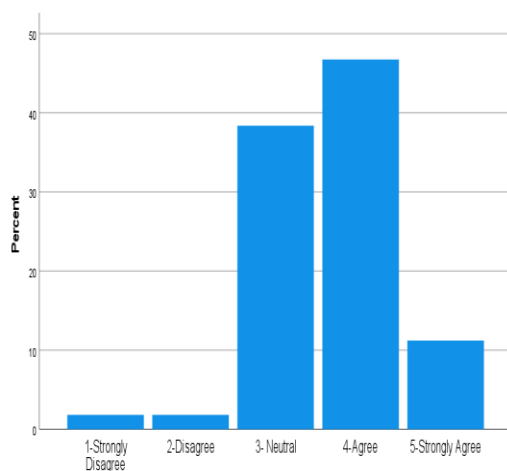


Figure 4-level of confidence amongst students to address to ethical dilemmas in a clinical environment.

Discussion:

About 20-25 years age groups were responsive to the survey and most of them were house officers almost all were educated about the significance of ethical behavior most of them believed that ethical behavior is focused on and reinforced in the curriculum about half of them were neutral and half agreed that we foster a culture where the students are motivated to report unethical behavior they witness among the peers majority of them agreed that their dental institute faculty and staff exemplify ethical behavior as positive role model (13).

In 2021 an article was published that discussed the concept of professionalism in dental education, emphasizing its importance in the healthcare profession. It highlighted the variations in defining and

understanding professionalism across different cultures and regions (14) the revised BDS 5 curriculum in New Zealand emphasizes learner-focused education, competency, and patient-centered care. It aligns with regulatory standards and supports both student and teacher development. Positive feedback indicates its effectiveness in preparing students for independent practice. Additionally, the curriculum's adaptability suggests potential benefits for other areas of health education (15, 16, and 11)

The study conducted at the College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh, aimed to investigate the professionalism levels among undergraduate dental students (17). Using the Dundee Poly-professionalism Inventory, the study found a high level of consensus among participants regarding the recognition of unprofessional behaviors and recommended sanctions. Notably, students did not advocate for ignoring any unprofessional behaviors (18). The study underscores the significance of teaching professionalism early in dental education and the role of role modeling by faculty members in shaping students' professional behavior. Additionally, it addresses the need for continuous efforts to instill professionalism throughout the dental curriculum, considering cultural differences and evolving healthcare landscapes (19, 20).

According to the study conducted on 27th August 2023 in the Faculty of Dentistry, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, revealed areas of low confidence among

undergraduate dental students in communication towards patients and paradental staff. Barriers and challenges have been identified with an action plan suggested accordingly (21, 22). And same was the result of our study in participants' opinions that continued medical education will help dentists to improve their communication skills (23).

Similarly, our results stated that most dental graduates do learn ethics and professionalism from their peers but this subject should be added to their curriculum which supported the results of a study conducted on 23rd November 2019 at the College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh (24, 1)

CONCLUSION:

Dental students shared very intriguing and refreshing reviews on professionalism and ethical teaching in dental schools. Many students felt that getting into dentistry was an opportunity to not only be able to cope but to be able to thrive in situations with uncertainty having no clear solutions or questions with no straightforward answers. This is truly a daunting responsibility for instructors at the faculty to design a curriculum considering super complexity levels. Holistic curriculum approaches can help students integrate all aspects of their learning to build resilience against super-complex situations. It seems that the first year of dental school is the ideal time for ethical reflection, insights, and guiding dental students on how to make appropriate choices in super-complex scenarios. This study suggests that a curriculum should be designed to develop psychological attributes with the use of effective teaching and learning.

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Author's Contribution:

Mahrukh Iqbal: Concept, Data analysis and final Drafting

Rida Faiz: Concept and data collection.

Sobia Khan: Literature search and literature review.

Madiha Khan: Data collection and Data analysis

Ayesha Faraz: Results and Data collection

Kamal Muhammad Mustafa: Literature search and data collection



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