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titleThe Influence of Personal Values and Ethics on Professional Conduct in
Nursing Practice Settings
authorLillian Gomez, Aria West, Corbin Foster
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sectionIntroduction The nursing profession operates at the intersection of scientific knowledge, technical skill, and profound human interaction, creating a practice environment where personal values and professional ethics constantly intersect. This research addresses a critical gap in understanding how nurses' individual moral frameworks shape their professional conduct, decision-making processes, and overall quality of care delivery. While extensive literature exists on nursing ethics as a theoretical discipline, comparatively little research has examined the lived experience of value negotiation that occurs daily in clinical practice. The contemporary healthcare landscape presents nurses with increasingly complex ethical challenges, from technological advancements in life-sustaining treatments to evolving societal values regarding patient autonomy and cultural diversity. These developments necessitate a deeper understanding of how personal value systems influence professional behavior.

Our investigation builds upon established ethical theories while introducing novel perspectives on value integration in professional practice. We move beyond traditional approaches that treat personal and professional ethics as separate domains, instead proposing a dynamic model of ethical negotiation that acknowledges the fluid boundaries between these spheres. The research questions guiding this study include: How do nurses perceive the relationship between their personal values and professional ethical obligations? What strategies do nurses employ when personal values conflict with institutional policies or professional standards? To what extent does alignment or dissonance between personal and professional ethics affect job satisfaction, moral distress, and quality of care?

This research makes several original contributions to the field. First, we develop and validate a comprehensive framework for assessing value-ethics alignment in nursing practice. Second, we identify specific coping mechanisms that nurses utilize when navigating value conflicts. Third, we propose evidence-based interven-

tions that healthcare organizations can implement to support ethical resilience among nursing staff. By examining the nuanced interplay between personal morality and professional duty, this study offers practical insights for enhancing both ethical practice and professional fulfillment in nursing.

sectionMethodology

subsectionResearch Design This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, allowing for comprehensive exploration of the research questions through both quantitative measurement and qualitative understanding. The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey design to assess relationships between personal values, ethical alignment, and professional outcomes across a diverse sample of practicing nurses. The qualitative component employed a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of nurses navigating value-ethics interactions in their daily practice. This dual approach enabled triangulation of findings and provided rich, contextualized understanding of the complex phenomena under investigation.

subsectionParticipants and Sampling A stratified random sampling technique was used to recruit 347 registered nurses from various healthcare settings including hospitals, community health centers, long-term care facilities, and specialty clinics. Participants represented diverse clinical specialties, years of experience, and demographic backgrounds to ensure comprehensive representation of the nursing population. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling identified 28 nurses who had experienced significant ethical challenges in their practice, ensuring depth and richness in the phenomenological data.

subsectionData Collection Instruments We developed and validated several instruments specifically for this research. The Personal Values Assessment Scale (PVAS) measures core value dimensions including autonomy, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity using a 7-point Likert scale. The Ethical Alignment Inventory (EAI) assesses congruence between personal values and professional ethical obligations across 15 clinical scenarios. Professional outcomes were measured using established instruments including the Moral Distress Scale-Revised, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews exploring nurses' experiences with value conflicts, ethical decision-making processes, and coping strategies.

subsectionData Analysis Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to examine relationships between value-ethics alignment and professional outcomes. Structural equation modeling tested our theoretical framework of ethical negotiation. Qualitative

data underwent thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six-step approach, with particular attention to identifying patterns of value negotiation and ethical reasoning. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation, where statistical relationships were enriched and contextualized through narrative accounts.

sectionResults

subsectionQuantitative Findings The quantitative analysis revealed significant relationships between value-ethics alignment and multiple professional outcomes. Nurses reporting high congruence between personal values and professional ethics demonstrated significantly lower levels of moral distress ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.001$) and emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.59$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, value dissonance correlated strongly with intentions to leave the profession ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) and reduced job satisfaction ($r = -0.64$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis indicated that value-ethics alignment accounted for 42

Factor analysis of the PVAS identified five distinct value clusters that influenced ethical decision-making: patient advocacy values, relational care values, professional integrity values, self-preservation values, and organizational loyalty values. Nurses prioritized these value clusters differently based on clinical context, with patient advocacy values predominating in life-threatening situations and relational care values guiding chronic care management. These findings challenge uniform approaches to ethical education and suggest the need for context-sensitive ethical support.

subsectionQualitative Findings The qualitative analysis revealed four major themes characterizing nurses' experiences with value-ethics integration. The first theme, textitEthical Navigation, described the conscious processes nurses use to reconcile personal moral commitments with professional obligations. Participants frequently described developing textitethical compasses that helped them maintain moral integrity while adhering to professional standards. The second theme, textitValue Negotiation, captured the dynamic process of weighing competing values in clinical decision-making. Nurses described sophisticated mental frameworks for prioritizing values based on patient needs, institutional constraints, and personal moral boundaries.

The third theme, textitMoral Resilience, emerged as a protective factor against ethical distress. Nurses who demonstrated moral resilience employed strategies such as ethical reframing, professional boundary maintenance, and peer support to navigate value conflicts. The final theme, textitOrganizational Ethical Climate, highlighted the critical role of institu-

tional context in either supporting or undermining value-ethics alignment. Nurses working in environments with transparent ethical discourse and supportive leadership reported significantly better outcomes when facing value conflicts.

subsectionIntegrated Findings The integration of quantitative and qualitative data revealed several novel insights. First, value-ethics alignment operates not as a binary state but as a dynamic continuum that nurses navigate throughout their careers. Second, successful navigation of value conflicts requires both individual moral competencies and supportive organizational structures. Third, the most effective ethical decision-making occurs when nurses can authentically integrate personal values with professional role obligations rather than suppressing one in favor of the other.

Our data suggest that traditional ethical education focusing primarily on principle-based reasoning may be insufficient for preparing nurses for the complex value negotiations required in contemporary practice. Instead, we identified a need for educational approaches that help nurses develop ethical agility—the capacity to adapt their moral reasoning to diverse clinical contexts while maintaining core professional commitments.

sectionConclusion This research makes several significant contributions to understanding the influence of personal values on professional conduct in nursing practice. First, we have demonstrated that value-ethics alignment is a critical factor influencing multiple professional outcomes including job satisfaction, moral distress, and retention. Second, we have identified specific mechanisms through which nurses negotiate value conflicts, providing a foundation for targeted interventions. Third, we have developed and validated assessment tools that can help healthcare organizations identify nurses at risk for value-related ethical distress.

The practical implications of this research are substantial. Healthcare organizations can utilize our findings to develop more effective ethical support systems, including value clarification workshops, ethical mentorship programs, and organizational policies that acknowledge the legitimate role of personal values in professional practice. Nursing education programs can incorporate value-awareness training that helps students develop the ethical agility needed for contemporary practice.

Several limitations warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, and the self-report nature of some measures may introduce social desirability bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine how value-ethics alignment evolves throughout nurses' careers and explore cultural variations in value prioritization across different healthcare systems.

In conclusion, this research reframes the relationship between personal values and professional ethics from one of potential conflict to one of dynamic integra-

tion. By acknowledging the legitimate role of personal morality in professional practice and providing structures to support ethical negotiation, healthcare organizations can enhance both the ethical quality of care and the professional fulfillment of nursing staff. The Ethical Alignment Framework proposed in this study offers a practical approach for achieving this integration, potentially transforming how we conceptualize and support ethical practice in nursing.

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