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The principle of justice and the image of the nursing profession in society: A concept analysis

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Abstract

Background: The ethical principle of justice in nursing is often interpreted differently by patients and nurses. This principle does not function in isolation but rather complements other ethical values, leading to challenges in various situations. A common issue is the public perception of discrimination against patients utilizing the National Health Insurance, which affects the nursing profession's image.

Purpose: To establish a clear definition of the principle of justice in relation to the public perception of the nursing profession.

Method: A concept analysis approach based on Avant's framework was employed, utilizing online databases (PubMed and Google Scholar) with the keywords 'justice,' 'professional image,' and 'nurse.' Literature published between 2003 and 2023 was reviewed.

Results: The concept analysis identified a conceptual and operational definition of justice concerning the nursing profession's image. The study outlined the attributes, antecedents, consequences, and empirical indicators associated with nurses' professional image.

Conclusion: The operational definition of the nursing profession's image in society refers to the public's perception of the overall impression of nurses' behavior, which is deliberately shaped.

Keywords: Justice; Professional Image; Society.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare is a vital component of the healthcare system, involving a multidisciplinary team of medical professionals, including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers. Ethical conduct among medical personnel plays a critical role in ensuring the delivery of high-quality and safe patient care (Yulianty, Alki, Siska, & Ratmat, 2023). Nurses, as key members of the healthcare team, are responsible for providing safe and evidence-based nursing care (Potter, Perry, Stockert, & Hall, 2021).

A nurse is an individual who has completed higher education in nursing, either domestically or internationally, and is officially recognized by the government according to legal regulations. Nurses play a significant role in delivering nursing care, both

within healthcare facilities and in the community. Nursing itself refers to the practice of providing care to individuals, families, groups, or communities, regardless of their health status. In performing their duties, nurses are expected to uphold fairness, as mandated by Indonesian Law 38/2014 on Nursing, specifically stated in Article 2, which emphasizes that nursing practice must be grounded in the principle of justice (Republic of Indonesia, 2014). Fair nursing practice (justice) is a fundamental value in professional nursing, ensuring that nurses adhere to standard operational procedures and act within legal boundaries (Riskika, Harun, Purnamawati, Nasir, Hakim, Firsty, Anggraini, Panma, Nyumirah, & Suhartini, 2022).

Justice is a core ethical principle in nursing, forming one of the 12 essential competencies required of nurses. Adhering to ethical principles in nursing care helps prevent both physical and emotional harm to patients. Therefore, nurses must be guided by ethical values, including autonomy (self-determination), non-maleficence (avoiding harm), beneficence (promoting well-being), justice (fairness), veracity (truthfulness), and fidelity (keeping commitments) (Kozier, Erb, Berman, Snyder, Levett-Jones, Dwyer, & Stanley, 2015). Among these ethical principles, justice is particularly significant, as it is often interpreted differently by patients and nurses, especially concerning service provision. Conceptually, justice refers to the moral obligation to treat all individuals fairly. However, this principle does not function independently; instead, it complements other ethical values, which can sometimes lead to challenges in practical application (Mangara, 2022).

A current issue regarding justice in nursing is the public perception of discrimination against patients using government-provided health insurance, specifically the National Health Insurance, which is designed for low-income individuals and fully subsidized by the government. The number of National Health Insurance participants has reached 254.9 million, meaning that over 90% of Indonesia's population receives government-subsidized healthcare, including 96.7 million underprivileged individuals (Ministry of Health of the Republic of

Indonesia, 2023). However, a report highlighted instances of discrimination against National Health Insurance patients in 2022, including issues related to medication distribution, hospital readmissions, and membership deactivation. Furthermore, viral videos have surfaced depicting cases of patient neglect by healthcare workers due to their status as National Health Insurance beneficiaries. This ongoing phenomenon has contributed to a negative public perception of nurses, as they are often seen as the frontline providers of healthcare services (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

An analytical approach developed by Avant was utilized, focusing on concept analysis to clarify and refine a concept, serving as a foundation for theory development. According to Avant's concept analysis framework, there are eight essential steps: selecting the concept, defining the purpose of the analysis, identifying defining attributes, developing case models, recognizing related cases, distinguishing separate cases, and determining antecedents and consequences. For this analysis, literature was sourced from online databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar using the keywords 'justice,' 'self-image,' 'nurse,' and 'society.' The collected literature was published within the last two decades, from 2003 to 2023.

RESEARCH RESULTS

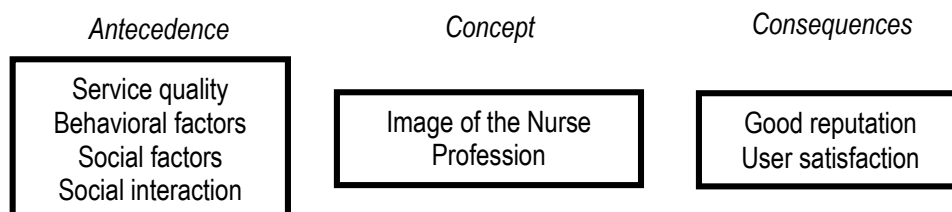


Figure 1. Conceptualization of the antecedents, attributes, and consequences

Selecting the concept: The principle of justice is a fundamental value in professional nursing practice, reflected in the provision of appropriate therapy in accordance with legal regulations, professional standards, and ethical beliefs to ensure high-quality healthcare services (Nurohmat & Ruswadi, 2021). In nursing, justice emphasizes the equitable distribution of healthcare services, prioritizing those in greatest

need. This aligns with the goal of ensuring fair treatment for all patients, particularly in resource allocation, medical decision-making, and healthcare policies (American Nurses Association, 2015).

This principle mandates that healthcare providers deliver services without discrimination based on economic status, political views, religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, social status, or citizenship. However,

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perceptions of justice can differ between nurses and patients. For instance, in emergency care, prioritizing treatment based on the severity of a condition (triage) can sometimes be perceived as unfair, potentially affecting the public's view of the nursing profession and leading to accusations of discrimination.

The term image is defined in the third edition of the dictionary as a mental representation or perception of a person or entity. Image as the impression, perception, or public opinion of an individual, organization, or company—often deliberately shaped (Soemirat, 2012). Meanwhile, the *Indonesian Librarian Dictionary* defines image as something perceived by the senses but not necessarily possessing an authentic existence (Wibawa, 2017).

Determining the purpose of the analysis: The aim of analyzing the concept of the nursing profession's image in society is to clarify ambiguous concepts, develop an operational definition of the nursing profession's image, and assess existing measurement tools or establish new ones.

Identifying the defining attributes: Image or perception, visual image, wish image, overall impression, one's behavior in the eyes of others, and public image that is deliberately created. Based on these attributes, the operational definition of the nursing profession's image in society can be formulated as the public's perception of the overall impression of nurses' behavior, which is intentionally shaped.

Model case identification: A 45-year-old woman was brought to the Emergency Department by her family at 9 PM, exhibiting restlessness and the strong odor of laundry detergent. The family reported that she had attempted suicide by drinking liquid detergent but had consumed only a small amount before being stopped by family members. Upon assessment, the nurse recorded the following vital signs: GCS 15, blood pressure 110/90 mmHg, pulse 100 bpm, temperature 36.8°C, and respiratory rate 18 breaths per minute. The nurse proceeded with emergency management according to triage protocols and standard operating procedures. Additionally, the nurse informed the family about the patient's condition and instructed them to complete the registration process, including providing the National Health Insurance card.

Shortly after, another patient arrived with a decreased level of consciousness, prompting all ER personnel to shift their focus to the new case. Meanwhile, the suicide attempt patient remained restless and hysterical. Feeling neglected, the patient's family perceived this as unfair treatment, believing that the nurses prioritized the unconscious patient because they were a general (self-paying) patient rather than a National Health Insurance participant.

Frustrated, the family accused the hospital of discrimination, arguing that their relative was ignored due to their National Health Insurance patient status. They recorded videos of nurses tending to the newly arrived patient, framing the situation to suggest that their distressed family member was being neglected simply because they were a National Health Insurance patient, while the hospital prioritized general patients. This incident contributed to a negative public perception of nurses and reinforced concerns about inequality in healthcare services.

Identifying borderline cases: A 35-year-old male, Mr. T, was brought to the hospital emergency department by a co-worker with an open wound approximately 5 cm long and 4 cm deep on his left femur, actively bleeding. The patient appeared weak and agitated. According to the co-worker, Mr. T had been injured by a rubber-cutting machine at the factory where he worked.

Upon arrival, the nurse performed a triage assessment and provided initial wound care following standard procedures. The patient's vital signs were recorded as follows: blood pressure 120/90 mmHg, pulse 98 bpm, temperature 36.5°C, and respiratory rate 20 breaths per minute. The nurse administered an RL fluid infusion and sutured the wound. However, despite the treatment, Mr. T continued to grimace in pain. The nurse then instructed the co-worker to purchase medication from an external pharmacy, as the hospital pharmacy was out of stock. The nurse also informed them that Mr. T would remain under observation for the time being.

Shortly afterward, another patient, a victim of a traffic accident with a decreased level of consciousness, arrived at the emergency room. Upon returning from the pharmacy, the co-worker saw that Mr. T was still in pain while the medical staff focused on treating the accident victim. Upon realizing that the accident victim was a board member, the co-worker

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perceived the situation as neglect and discrimination, feeling that Mr. T's care was deprioritized in favor of a high-status patient.

Identifying contrary cases: A 35-year-old male, Mr. T, was brought to the hospital emergency room by his co-worker with an open wound approximately 5 cm long and 4 cm deep on his left femur, with blood oozing. The patient appeared weak and restless. According to his co-worker, Mr. T sustained the injury after being struck by a rubber-cutting machine at the factory where he worked.

The nurse conducted a triage assessment and provided initial wound care following standard procedures. Mr. T's vital signs were recorded as blood pressure 120/90 mmHg, pulse 98 bpm, temperature 36.5°C, and respiratory rate 20 breaths per minute. The nurse administered an RL fluid infusion and sutured the wound. Despite receiving treatment, Mr. T continued to grimace in pain.

The nurse then instructed his co-worker to purchase medication from an external pharmacy, as the hospital pharmacy was out of stock. The nurse also informed them that Mr. T would remain under observation for a while.

Shortly after, a traffic accident victim arrived at the emergency room in a state of decreased consciousness. When Mr. T's co-worker returned after purchasing the medication, they saw that Mr. T was still in pain while the nurses were occupied treating the accident victim. Wanting to help, the co-worker encouraged Mr. T to take deep breaths, offered him a drink, and adjusted his position for comfort. They reassured Mr. T, reminding him to stay calm and relax, as the medical staff was busy attending to the more critical accident victim.

Defining empirical references: Empirical referents are specific categories or instances of real-world phenomena that signify the presence of a concept. However, they are not measurement tools for the concept itself. Instead, empirical referents serve as indicators that help identify or assess the defining characteristics or attributes of a concept, rather than the concept as a whole. Once identified, empirical referents play a crucial role in instrument development, as they are directly linked to the theoretical foundation of a concept. This connection helps enhance the content and validate any newly developed instruments (Walker & Avant, 2005).

Based on the identification of attributes and concepts related to the image of the nursing profession, the empirical referents include: public image and perception, the impression people form of intentionally exhibited behavior, the way nurses' behavior is perceived by others, the overall perception of nurses as an entity, and the opinions of outsiders shaped by the healthcare services they receive.

DISCUSSION

After identifying empirical references, the appropriate instrument for measuring the application of justice principles in nursing and its impact on the nursing profession's image in society is the Belimage questionnaire. This tool is designed for self-assessment of nurses' and midwives' professional image in clinical practice. It comprises 40 questions covering five key areas: personal information, education and professional competence, nursing care, teamwork, and the work environment. The questionnaire is administered to nurses and midwives at various levels, from staff nurses to head nurses and directors (Stadnicka & Zarzycka, 2023).

The legal and ethical aspects of nursing aim to uphold human dignity. Ethics, a branch of philosophy, examines moral distinctions between right and wrong, assessing the appropriateness of actions. Ethical principles are generally accepted by society (DeLaune, McTier, Tollefson, Lawrence, & Ladner, 2019). Among these, justice often becomes a point of contention. The principle of justice in nursing mandates fair and equal treatment of all patients, ensuring non-discriminatory distribution of healthcare resources. Justice in nursing encompasses three key components: Distributive Justice (equitable allocation of healthcare resources), Procedural Justice (decision-making based on transparent and consistent rules), and Compensatory Justice (providing redress for individuals who suffer harm due to healthcare disparities) (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994).

To promote justice in healthcare, the Indonesian government has implemented several policies, including Law No. 38 of 2014 on Nursing, which establishes ethical standards for nursing practice, and Minister of Health Regulation No. 11/2017 on Patient Safety, which emphasizes equitable and patient-centered care (Republic of Indonesia, 2014; Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017). The

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Indonesian Nursing Code of Ethics further mandates that nurses provide services fairly and respect patients' rights, regardless of their socioeconomic status. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring the equitable distribution of healthcare resources in remote areas and hospitals with limited facilities. These disparities can erode public trust in healthcare services (Indonesian National Nurses Association, 2020).

Patient trust in medical professionals is crucial for effective healthcare delivery. Ethical behavior among healthcare providers fosters this trust through fair treatment, respect for patient autonomy, and the protection of patient confidentiality (Samil, 2001). Failure to uphold justice in nursing can lead to distrust, reduced quality of care, and broader negative consequences for individuals, communities, and the healthcare system as a whole (Salsabila, Ramadini, Sari, & Gurning, 2023). According to Daniels (2007), injustice in nursing services can contribute to negative stereotypes, portraying nurses as lacking empathy or professionalism. Additionally, research indicates that unclear role divisions between nurses and anesthesiologists can create workplace injustices, leading to diminished professional rights and a weakened nursing image. Such injustices may also have legal ramifications for healthcare institutions (Muhali & Kuntardjo, 2024). Other studies highlight that injustices in healthcare can degrade service quality, ultimately harming the public perception of the nursing profession (Zulian & Utomo, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this concept analysis led to the creation of an operational definition of the nursing profession's image in the community, which refers to the public's perception of the overall impression of a nurse's behavior that is intentionally shaped. To measure the concept of how the principles of justice are applied in nursing and their impact on the nursing profession's image, the Belimage questionnaire is the most suitable tool. This instrument covers five key components: personal information, education and professional competence, nursing care, teamwork, and the work environment.

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