



## Original research

## Fairness and respect in nurse educators' work— nursing students' perceptions



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## ABSTRACT

This study describes how the ethical principles of fairness and respect come true in the work of nurse educators from the perspective of nursing students. Nurse educators' competence of professional ethics is important in providing an ethical role model to nursing students and to professionals in the field of health care. The descriptive cross-sectional study design was used. The data were collected from graduating nursing students ( $n = 202$ ) in Finland with an internet-based questionnaire consisting of 22 structured questions with 5-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics.

The findings revealed that educators' fairness and respect towards others (colleagues, superiors, mentors, nursing leaders) was good but towards students their fairness did not achieve as good a level. Also, according to the students' assessment, the educators did not respect the students' individual opinions in all cases. Educators' fairness and respect towards their colleagues was satisfactory. The appreciation of educators in the society was reasonably good, but in the opinion of the students the views of educators were not respected very much.

As a conclusion, can be said that educators need to put more emphasis on their action.

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## 1. Introduction

Nurse educators' strong competence of professional ethics is important in providing an ethical role model to the nursing students and to professionals of the field of health care (Lewenson et al., 2005; Memarian et al., 2007; Råholm, 2008; Klunklin et al., 2011). Ethical competence of nurse educators can be defined by their ethical knowledge and its implementation in their own work. It also has to do with the educator's aim and ability to make justified moral choices for the benefit of his/her students and colleagues (Salminen et al., 2013a). Moreover, it involves the educator's ability to act responsibly in relation to ethical choices (Råholm, 2008; Klunklin et al., 2011). In this study the ethical principles are defined as a generalized framework within which particular ethical dilemmas may be analyzed. In some countries, nurse educators

have committed themselves to ethical codes which describe the main ethical principles of educator's work and which indicate the ethical operation required by the profession (AAE, 1996).

In this study, the nurse educator is a teacher who teaches theoretical nursing studies in higher education. In Finland, the nurse educator is required to have a master's degree, and at least three years of working experience in a health care organization. There are no own ethical codes for nurse educators in Finland, but they follow the common teachers' ethical codes set by the Trade Union of Educators in Finland (1996). These deal with e.g. the principles of ethical action in relation to the nurse educators' own work, the student, work community and society.

The topic of this research is important because nurse educators' ethical action has a strong impact on professional value development of nursing students. Also, it is important because too many students feel injustice and unethical behavior by their educators during the studies in nursing. (Råholm, 2008; Salminen et al., 2013a). Moreover, research on nurse educators' ethical action is scarce (Salminen et al., 2013a, 2015).

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## 2. Background

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the code of ethics for teachers in Finland (Trade Union of Educators (1996); Salminen et al., 2013a). The action of the educator is considered from the point of view of the teacher's knowledge of ethical principles, teacher's ethical action in relation to students, colleagues and society. The values behind these codes are human dignity, honesty, fairness, responsibility and freedom (Salminen et al., 2013a). The nursing students adopt their professional ethics during their education, and for this reason it is important that the nurse educator provides a high-level role model in ethical issues (Thorkildsen and Råholm, 2010).

An educator who works ethically respects the student's privacy, treats the student equally (Lyndaker, 1992; Lindgren and Athlin, 2010) and assumes the responsibility for the student's learning outcomes (Lyndaker, 1992; Janhonen and Sarja, 2005). Fair and honest assessment of students' learning is the most important demand for educators (Lyndaker, 1992; Luhanga et al., 2010; Salminen et al., 2013b). Nevertheless, students have come across injustice in student assessments and in feedback (Lewenson et al., 2005; Salminen et al., 2013a).

In general, the student-teacher relationship has been found to be good (Salminen et al., 2013b). In this relationship, nursing students appreciate good interaction (Dinc and Görgulu, 2002; Gillespie, 2005). The students expect encouraging feedback and professional attitude from the part of the educator (Hanson and Stenvig, 2008). They expect the educators to listen to them, respect them and appreciate their views (Dinc and Görgulu, 2002; Kelly, 2007; Klunklin et al., 2011).

Nurse educator should work in good cooperation with her colleagues. The educator can promote highly ethical atmosphere and competence in the work community by behaving in a socially suitable way (Klunklin et al., 2011). Moreover, cooperation between the mentor and the educator in clinical placements is very important so that the students can get as good supervision as possible and their evaluation can be secured in a fair manner (Hunink et al., 2009; Paton and Binding, 2009; McSharry et al., 2010).

It is good for the educators to know the expectations and demands set for them during their clinical training. This includes respect towards mentors (Hanson and Stenvig, 2008). According to Yildirim et al. (2007), several nurse educators have experienced unprofessional behaviour in their own work community. Most of it has to do with the administrators of the education program or with colleagues' unprofessional behaviour. The educators have experienced lack of appreciation and recrimination, which has affected their work negatively as educators (Yildirim et al., 2007).

The ethical codes of teachers (AAE, 1996; Trade Union of Educators, 1996) obligate educators to continuing professional development and promotion of public health (Viverais-Dresler and Kutschke, 2001; Davis et al., 2005). The educators have seen their opportunities to be quite minimal in influencing curricula of nursing education and the content of teaching, because the government, administrators or other authorities are the ones who make the decisions about these issues. The educators feel they must follow those guidelines (Carr, 2007).

Single, descriptive studies have been conducted on nurse educators who work with professional ethics. The two most important ethical principles of the nurse educator are fairness and respect for the human values; without those, the educator cannot act according to professional ethics. More information is needed about how the nurse educators in practice apply these ethical principles in their work community with the students, colleagues, administrators and other partners in cooperation.

The aim of this study is to describe the realization of the ethical

principles of fairness and respect in the work of nurse educators from the perspective of nursing students.

The research questions were:

1. How do nursing students assess their educators' fairness and respect towards students, colleagues, superiors, clinical mentors and nursing leaders?
2. How do nursing students assess the fairness and respect towards the nurse educator by the collaborators of educators (students, colleagues, educators' superiors, clinical mentors and nursing leaders)?
3. How do nursing students assess nurse educators' appreciation in the society?

## 3. Method and materials

### 3.1. Design

A cross-sectional research design was used.

### 3.2. Instrument

The instrument "Nurse Educators' Ethics and Value Base" (Salminen et al., 2013a) was modified for this study, to measure views of nursing students about nurse educators' knowledge of ethical principles inherent in the codes of ethics governing their work as educators and their descriptions of the implementation of ethical principles of fairness and respect to the students, colleagues, superiors, nursing leaders, clinical instructors and society (Salminen et al., 2013a). The instrument was based on the similarly named questionnaire "Nurse Educators' Ethics and Value Base", which was created to measure nurse educators' knowledge of ethical principles and their implementation (Salminen et al., 2013a). The only modification was applied to the wording to accommodate the point of view of students. The students were asked to assess how mentioned items (variables) in the instrument come true in their educators' action. A pilot study with 20 nursing students was conducted before data collection. Based on the pilot study, some items of the questionnaire were reformulated to make them easier to understand.

The instrument consisted of twenty-two items ( $n = 22$ ) in three categories: fairness, respect, and appreciation of the educators in society. Fairness and respect was measured as the nursing student's description of nurse educators' fairness (5 items) and respect (5 items) towards students, colleagues, superiors, clinical mentors and nursing leaders and of these groups' implementation of fairness (5 items) and respect (5 items) towards the nurse educators. The appreciation of the educators in society was measured as the nursing student's description of how fairly and respectfully nurse educators were seen and appreciated in society (2 items). A 5-point Likert scale was used in the instrument (5 = very well; 1 = very poorly). Socio-demographic variables included the participant's age, gender, previous health-related profession, educational program (nurse, midwife, public health nurse or emergency nurse) and previous working experience in health related profession. One question, for which a 5-point Likert scale (5 = very good; 1 = very poor) was used, measured an educator's knowledge of ethical principles.

### 3.3. Participants and data collection

The population of the study consisted of all graduating nurse, midwife, public health nurse and emergency nurse students ( $N = 1241$ ) in nine different nursing schools (called in Finland

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