Original Article

Attitude of Students toward Dental Ethics, Morals and Student-Teacher Relationship in Higher Education: Across-Sectional Descriptive Survey

Vanshika Arora[1], Uttkarsha Pekhale[1], Yashika Paladia[1], Neha Suthar[1], Pulkit Chaturvedi[2]

[1]Intern, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Darshan Dental College and Hospital, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India, [2]Professor and Head, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Darshan Dental College and Hospital, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

Background: Dentists must provide their patients with ethical and safe care. **Objectives:** The purpose of this study intended to analyze dental students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding dental ethics in Udaipur. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study using a validated online self-administrated questionnaire was completed by dental students of Udaipur City. Descriptive statistics were used for the statistical analysis. **Results:** The participants were 203 dental students. About 80.8% of students were aware of the Hippocratic Oath. About 91.6% of respondents reported obtaining written consent from the patients. In case of any malfunction during treatment, 82.3% of students agreed to inform the patients. Regarding patients' ability to pay, only 54.2% of dental students agreed for it. The majority of students knew little about the ethics committee's services and activities. **Conclusion:** Gaps in knowledge, attitude, and practices of medical ethics were found among dental students of the two faculties. Attention should be paid to improving the present situation.

Key words: Attitude, Dental students, Dentistry, Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Dental ethics can be defined as the moral duties and obligations of the dentist toward his patients, professional colleagues, and to society.[1] It is also known as the study of human nature and behavior; commitments must be kept based on what is ethically correct and immoral, and respectable interpersonal relationships should be maintained.[2] Ethics is an inherent and inseparable part of clinical medicine as the physician has an ethical obligation (i) to benefit the patient, (ii) to avoid or minimize harm, and (iii) to respect the values and preferences of the patient.[3]

Attention should be given equally to ethical and bioethical knowledge and attitude, where ethics relate to assessing personal behavior, while bioethics is more related to the sense of public health responsibilities and decision-making parameters.[2]

The aim of developing professional ethical codes for dentists is to provide an ethical standard for dentists' practice, to inform the public of these standards, and to achieve professional integrity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes on respecting the patients' dignity in health care.[4]

Dentists and dental students are required to offer legal treatment to patients without making any medical errors, and many institutions require dentists to have knowledge and training in bioethics about patients' "rights and wants." Research on ethics can provide dentists with the knowledge they need to address any ethical quandaries. It is vital to follow official norms and codes of ethics, which can be used when treating patients. Such principles assist dental professionals in setting high ethical standards when practicing clinical dentistry and doing scientific research.[2] Morals, on the other hand, are the personal views and values that individuals have about what is good and wrong.[1]

As they transition from high school to college, adolescents confront increasing academic responsibilities and a less structured environment. Good relationships with instructors are seen to be a key component in adaptive academic behavior. However, few longitudinal studies have studied the correlation between teacher-student interactions and academic adaptation over time in the higher education context, specifically focusing on freshmen and differentiating the between-person and within-person impacts.[5]

The student-teacher relationship in dental education plays a crucial role in the development of ethical and moral standards among future dentists. This relationship should be built on mutual respect, trust, and open communication. A strong, ethically

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Uttkarsha Pekhale, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Darshan Dental College and Hospital, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.
E-mail: patiluttu2002@gmail.com

grounded student-teacher relationship brings up an environment where students feel supported in their learning journey. It encourages them to ask questions, seek guidance on ethical issues, and develop a deep understanding of the moral responsibilities they will carry as practicing dentists.

In this way, the relationship between students and teachers in dental education is foundational to the cultivation of a professional identity rooted in ethics and moral responsibility.[2]

Therefore, this study is designed to evaluate the attitude of students toward their teachers and about student-teacher relationships.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design

This cross-sectional study was designed to evaluate the attitude of dental students from Udaipur city. Students were selected using a convenience sampling technique.

Study setting

Data were collected using an online self-administered questionnaire containing 20 questions. A Google Form was circulated among the dental students of Udaipur City. They were asked if they agreed or disagreed with certain statements concerning ethical conduct, autonomy, confidentiality, informing patients about wrongdoing, informed consent, and the attitude of students against their teachers. A total of 203 students responded.

This study was conducted by the Department of Public Health Dentistry (Darshan Dental College and Hospital).

Study duration

This study was conducted consecutively for 3 days during the month of September in the year 2024.

Inclusion criteria

The study included undergraduate students and post-graduate students of Udaipur city.

Exclusion criteria

Dental practitioners, non-teaching staffs, and the students who did not respond back were excluded.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the percentage.

RESULTS

This cross-sectional study compares dental students of Udaipur regarding the attitude of students toward dental ethics, morals, and student-teacher relationship in higher education. In this study, 203 students participated and the characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Students' knowledge of the basic concepts of ethics is reported in Table 2 dental students' attitudes toward ethical principles and their applications are summarized in Table. Knowledge about the Hippocratic Oath was reported by more than 80% of the participants. About 68.5% of dental students believed ethical knowledge was essential in their work. Dental students were able to discuss their ethical concerns with their instructors. Students believed that ethics guidelines are helpful tools in their professional lives and agreed that teaching ethics is important.

Table 3 represents the responses of dental students to questions related to unethical practices.

It shows that students agreed on the point that indulging in unethical practices can affect their academic performance.

About 82.3% of respondents agreed that patients should be informed about any malfunction during dental procedures and that the government should apply norms regarding the same.

Table 4 shows that more than 90% of students agreed that patients should be given a copy of informed consent.

DISCUSSION

In this study, 76.4% of respondents were men and 23.6% were women. This observation is consistent with those of Nassar *et al.* (2022).[2] This survey demonstrates that around 35% of students were uninformed of dental ethics. As a result, it is critical to provide dentistry students with ethical training. This statement contradicts the findings of Nassar *et al.* (2022).[2] More than 60% of the study's participants reported having a good experience consulting with their supervisor about ethical issues. AlShehri *et al.* (2020) reported parallel findings.[6] More than half of the students agreed to treat patients regardless of their capacity to pay. This finding is consistent with past research that has showed dental workers to exhibit similar behavior.

Oberoi *et al.* (2014)[7] emphasize that dentists and dental students are obligated to provide care to all patients within the community without any form of discrimination, as noted by Dharamsi *et al.* (2007).[8] The participants in this research concurred that informed consent should be obtained from patients in all circumstances; however, this perspective contrasts with the information provided by Medline Plus. The monograph titled "Informed Consent-Adults" (2013) indicates that informed consent may not be necessary in emergency situations where delaying treatment could pose a risk to the patient's health.

A similar consensus was noted among respondents regarding the student-teacher dynamic, with agreement on its significant role

Table 1: Participants information

Education		Gender		Address			Age (years)			
UG (%)	PG (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Urban (%)	Peri-urban (%)	Rural (%)	17–20 years (%)	21–23 years (%)	24–25 years (%)	25 above (%)
98.50	1.5	23.6	76.4	73.4	13.8	12.8	20.2	59.6	18.2	2

Table 2: Dental ethics

Ethics	Yes (%)	No (%)	Maybe/not sure (%)
Awareness about dental ethics	139 (68.5)	38 (18.7)	26 (12.8)
Awareness about Hippocratic oath	164 (80.8)	28 (12.8)	11 (5.4)
Discussing ethical concerns with instructors	131 (64.5)	30 (14.8)	42 (20.7)
Dental health professionals serve as positive role models	163 (80.3)	12 (5.9)	28 (13.4)
Maintaining records of dental ethics with every patient	177 (87.2)	26 (12.8)	Nil

Table 3: Unethical practices

Unethical	Yes (%)	No (%)	Maybe (%)
Affecting academic performance of dental students	168 (82.8)	11 (5.4)	24 (11.8)
Dentists should always be truthful	180 (88.7)	7 (3.4)	16 (7.9)
Patients should be informed about any malfunction during dental procedures	167 (82.3)	13 (6.4)	23 (11.3)
Dentists refuse patients to treat based on their race, religion, and gender	28 (13.8)	164 (80.8)	11 (5.2)
The government should apply norms regarding unethical practices	176 (86.7)	14 (6.9)	Nil

Table 4: Consent

Consent	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
Patients have the right to get a copy of informed consent	186 (91.6)	17 (8.4)	Nil
Consent through online mode is acceptable	72 (35.5)	67 (33)	64 (31.5)

in fostering ethical standards within dental education. This aligns with the findings of Baker *et al.* (2008), which suggest that negative relationships can lead to student disengagement, poor academic performance, and behavioral issues.

While the data gathered from this study is valuable, it is important to note that it cannot be generalized. Future research could enhance this limitation by incorporating a larger sample size from various cities and avoiding reliance solely on self-reported data. This study represents one of the few in the region that addresses dental ethics, morals, and the student-teacher relationship, and despite its methodological constraints, it provides important evidence that can contribute to the development of further knowledge in this field.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study raise some fundamental issues in the ethical practice, informed consent, and student-teacher relationship in some of the dental schools. The findings show that even with the available courses there is a gap in knowledge, attitude, and practices of dental ethics among dental students of different dental schools. Attention should be paid in establishing continuous educational courses and assessment systems to ensure that dental students are equipped to resolve any ethical dilemmas before and after graduation.

REFERENCES

1. Soben P. Essentials of Preventive and Community Dentistry. 3rd ed. New Delhi: Arya (Medi) Publishing House; 2006.
2. Halboub E, Al-Maweri SA, Al-Jamaei AA, Al-Soneidar WA, Al-Sokalei M. Medical ethics knowledge and attitude among dental students from two universities in the Middle East. Int J Dent 2016;2016:1-8.
3. Beauchamp TL, Childress JF. Principles of Clinical Ethics and Their Application to Practice. 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press; 2019.
4. Hadian M, Asgari F, Jafari F, Haghani J, Samadi A. Design and development of dentistry ethical codes: Proposed for national implementation in Iran. Iran J Public Health 2019;48:1234-42.
5. Li JB. Teacher-student relationships and academic adaptation in college freshmen: Disentangling the between-person and within-person effects. J Adolesc 2022;94:538-53.
6. AlShehri E, Siddiqui AF, Khalil SN. Knowledge, attitude and practice of medical ethics among resident physicians of specialty certificate in Aseer Province, Saudi Arabia. J Liaquat Univ Med Health Sci 2020;19:4854.
7. Oberoi SS, Sharma N, Mohanty V, Marya C, Rekhi A, Oberoi A. Knowledge and attitude of faculty members working in dental institutions towards the dental treatment of patients with HIV/AIDS. Int Sch Res Notices 2014;2014:429692.
8. Dharamsi S, Pratt DD, MacEntee MI. How dentists account for social responsibility: Economic imperatives and professional obligations. J Dent Educ 2007;71:1583-92.