Original Article

Assessment of Professionalism and Code of Conduct and Behavioral Etiquettes among Dental Students in Udaipur: An Institutional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Dental ethics encompasses the moral principles and values that guide the behavior of dental professionals. Hence, this study was designed to investigate the manner to bring in which concerns about how dental ethics affects professionalism among dental practitioners and students. **Materials and Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study performed using a digital self-administered questionnaire based on non-probability convenience sampling, and the study was undertaken involving an Indian population that consisted of dental students through a questionnaire comprising 23 predefined responses, including ethical/dress code, professional attitude toward colleagues, and relationship between senior and junior dental students and professionals related questions. The pilot study was conducted on 20 participants to validate the questionnaire. **Results:** This study employed a large-scale online survey in which 238 responses were recorded. More than half of the respondents were females (53.2%). The majority of people have heard about the term ethical code of conduct in dentistry. Moreover, most people believed in "hygienic appearance for dental professionals" and "good behavior in classroom" for maintaining the ethical code of conduct among dentists and dental students. **Conclusion:** A professional person is expected to have respect for human beings, competence in his chosen field, integrity, and a primary concern with service rather than with prestige or profit.

Key words: Dental ethics, Professionalism, Code of conduct, Behavioral etiquette, Dental students

INTRODUCTION

"Dental ethics is not just about doing what is right, but also about doing what is right for the right reasons." Dentistry, like any other health care profession, abides by principles of ethics. The ethical principles help to establish expectations for dentists to practice their profession with a code of professional conduct and also aid in their current skills and knowledge.[1] Observance of ethics and behavior in society is one of the most important challenges of human social life, and ethical issues have become more widespread and complex with the growth of social life. The ethical issues that dentists face are increasing in today's society. Ethics affect the relationship among the dentist, patient, community, and office staff, and ignoring them weakens the dentist's ability to function as a professional.[2] Professionalism generally speaks to accepted or expected behaviors, while professional identity speaks more to the process of becoming and identifying as a professional.[3]

Dental students are trained to provide exceptional care to patients, but their education goes beyond technical proficiency; it also emphasizes the importance of professionalism, ethical behavior, and personal integrity. As future health-care providers, dental students must develop the skills not only to treat patients but also to interact with peers, faculty, and the community in a respectful and ethical manner. The conduct of dental students during their education is vital, as it shapes their future as practitioners and influences public trust in the dental profession. Professionalism is a cornerstone of dental education, ensuring that students understand the ethical and moral responsibilities inherent in the practice of dentistry. Professional behavior involves more than adhering to rules and guidelines; it encompasses qualities such as honesty, integrity, empathy, and respect for others.

Education plays an important role in developing a civil society, and higher education plays an important role in helping students develop a sense of civic and social responsibility and learn ways to contribute to the common good.[4] The graduates of today

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are different from those of 10 or 20 years ago, but dentistry is changing, and those that we are now qualifying face a very different world. The newly qualified are not what they used to be, nor, we suggest, should they be. They are different, but that does not mean worse.[5]

Dental professionals are among the most reliable professionals, so they must protect this trust despite the rapid change in the profession due to factors such as malfunctions and changes in the economic status of people.[2] This study aims to maintain a professional environment built on respect, integrity, and courtesy, which is essential. Adhering to a strong code of conduct and upholding behavioral etiquette ensures positive interactions and fosters mutual trust and collaboration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study setting and ethical approval

- Study name – A descriptive cross-sectional study
- Study setting – Department of Public Health Dentistry, Darshan Dental College and Hospital, Loyara, Udaipur
- Study duration – November 2024
- Study population – All the dental students of Udaipur, Rajasthan
- Approved by – Darshan Dental College Ethical Committee.

Study protocol

The study was done using convenience sampling (non-probability sampling). The confidence interval was 95% and the margin of error was 5%. The estimated sample size for this study was 238 participants. Dental students are included in this study.

Inclusion criteria

All participants who filled out the Google Forms and replied within the study duration were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria

All those who did not reply to the questionnaire were excluded from the study.

Study questionnaire

A descriptive cross-sectional questionnaire study was conducted on the behavior among the students in a dental institute in Udaipur City, India. Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were maintained, and the participation was voluntary. A pilot study was conducted on 20 participants to validate the questionnaire. A well-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. We extracted a list of dental students and subsequently sent them the survey through e-mail and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was then uploaded to www.googleforms.com. The online survey link was circulated through social media (WhatsApp).

RESULTS

Table 1 comprises demographic features, which include education and gender of the sample population. According to research conducted among 238 dental students, 85.2% were undergraduate students and 14.8% were postgraduate students. Females were 53.2% and males were 46.8%.

Students' knowledge of the basic concepts of ethics and assessment of professionalism and behavioral etiquette is given in the following tables. These tables allow readers to compare the variables of interest across the levels of the explanatory variable.

Table 2 illustrates that 80.6% of students acknowledged the ethical code of conduct. Out of 238 students, 93.7% agreed that their workplace has a dress code policy. 49.8% students have faced conflicts and disagreements with their seniors or colleagues, and 50.2% students have never been reprimanded or received feedback on their behavior in the classroom.

Table 3 depicts that 54.4% students believe the institution's code of conduct promotes a safe and respectful learning environment. Most of the students agreed that a dress code creates a sense of discipline among students. 51.5% students accept that violation of the code of conduct must result in disciplinary action, whereas 1.9% disagreed.

Table 4 shows that 95.4% students consider maintaining a clean and hygienic appearance for dental professionals to be important. Students who found that maintaining a professional relationship

Table 1: Demographic features of participants

Characteristics	Variables	*n* (%)
Education	BDS	202 (85.2)
	MDS	33 (14.8)
Gender	Female	126 (53.2)
	Male	109 (46.8)

Table 2: Knowledge and awareness of ethical code of conduct among dental students

Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)
Have you heard about the ethical code of conduct in dentistry?	190 (80.6)	45 (19.4)
Does your workplace have a dress code policy?	221 (93.7)	14 (6.3)
Do you think dental students should be allowed to wear jewellery in clinical settings?	21 (9.7)	214 (90.3)
Have you ever received feedback or guidance from a senior or colleague?	209 (88.6)	26 (11.4)
Have you ever faced conflicts or disagreements with your seniors or colleagues?	116 (49.8	119 (50.2)
Do you attend classes and clinical sessions regularly?	228 (96.6	7 (3.4)
Have you ever been reprimanded or received feedback on your behavior in the classroom or clinical settings?	116 (49.8)	119 (50.2)

Table 3: Perceptions toward institutional code of conduct and discipline

Questions	Variables	*n* (%)
Do you believe the institution's code of conduct promotes a safe and respectful learning environment?	Strongly agree	128 (54.4)
	Agree	107 (45.1)
	Strongly disagree	11 (0.5)
Do you think following a dress code creates a sense of discipline among students?	Strongly agree	147 (62.4)
	Agree	85 (36.3)
	Disagree	7 (0.3)
	Strongly disagree	2 (1)
Do you believe it is essential to show respect to your seniors?	Strongly agree	149 (63.7)
	Agree	80 (34.2)
	Disagree	4 (2.1)
Do you believe that students who violate the code of conduct should face disciplinary action/actions?	Strongly agree	104 (44.7)
	Agree	121 (51.5)
	Disagree	2 (1.9)
	Strongly disagree	2 (1.9)

Table 4: Importance of Professional Appearance, Relationships, and Conduct in Dental Education

Questions	Variables	*n* (%)
How important is it for dental professionals to maintain a clean and hygienic appearance?	Very important	226 (95.4)
	Somewhat important	9 (4)
	Not very important	1.4 (0.6)
How important is it for you to maintain a professional relationship with your seniors and colleagues?	Very important	197 (83.1)
	Somewhat important	33 (14.8)
	Not very important	49 (2.1)
How important do you feel it is to collaborate with your colleagues and seniors in your institutions?	Very important	180 (76.8)
	Somewhat important	47 (20.7)
	Not very important	4 (2.2)
	Not at all important	0.7 (0.3)
How important is it for you to feel supported and valued by your colleagues and seniors?	Very important	192 (81.9)
	Somewhat important	38 (16)
	Not very important	4 (2)
	Not at all important	0.2 (0.1)
How important is it for you to attend classes and clinical sessions regularly?	Very important	207 (87.8)
	Somewhat important	26 (11)
	Not very important	2 (1)
	Not at all important	0.4 (0.2)
How important is it for you to maintain a professional and respectful attitude in the classroom/ clinical settings?	Very important	216 (91.6)
	Somewhat important	14 (6.5)
	Not very important	2 (1)
	Not at all important	2 (0.9)

Table 5: Self-assessment of communication skills, behavior, and attendance

Questions	Variables	*n* (%)
How would you rate the effectiveness of communication among each other?	Excellent	107 (45.1)
	Good	109 (46)
	Fair	19 (8)
	Poor	2 (0.9)
How would you rate your behavior in the classroom?	Excellent	123 (52.3)
	Good	97 (41.8)
	Fair	11 (5.5)
	Poor	0.9 (0.4)
What is your attendance rate for classes and clinical postings?	Excellent	138 (58.6)
	Good	88 (37.6)
	Fair	90 (3.8)

with seniors and colleagues is significant constituted 83.1%. 91.6% students say that it is very important to maintain a professional and respectful attitude in the classroom/clinical settings.

Table 5 illustrates that 45.1% of students satisfactorily assessed their effectiveness of communication as excellent and 41.8% of students graded their behavior in the classroom as good.

DISCUSSION

The dental profession is a vocation in which knowledge and skill are used for the service of others. One of the characteristics of a profession is adherence to a code of ethics.[6] In this study, 53.2% of respondents were females and 46.8% of respondents were males. This finding is in correlation with the findings of Halboub E *et al.* (2022).[6] This study shows that approximately 19.4% of students were unaware of dental ethics. Therefore, incorporating dental ethics training among the dental students is crucial. This statement is contradictory to the findings of Nassar *et al.* (2022).[6]

According to Nassar *et al.* (2022),[6] many students (58.3%) and (67.4%) at Umm Al-Qura University and Mansoura University will approach their supervisor if they face an issue whereas in this study, percentage has increased to 78.9% which shows that instead of compromising or avoiding solutions, students believe in resolving conflicts through open communication.

Data from this study is useful, yet it cannot be generalized. This limitation can be improved in future studies by including a larger sample from different cities and not relying only on self-reported data. Furthermore, the possibility exists that a single user could have completed the survey multiple times. When using Google Forms, it is difficult to prevent this.

This study is one of the few in the region that focuses on dental ethics, professionalism, and behavioral etiquette, and even with its methodological limitations, it offers valuable evidence that can be used to construct additional knowledge in future studies.

CONCLUSION

A profession consists of a limited group of persons who have acquired some special skills and are therefore able to perform that function in society better than the average person. A professional person is expected to have respect for human beings, competence in his chosen field, integrity, and a primary concern with service rather than with prestige or profit. Ethical codes are the result of an attempt to direct the moral consciousness of the members of the profession to its peculiar problems.[6]

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