The Relationship between Student Nurses' Emotional Intelligence and Personal and Professional Values

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Key Words: *student nurses, emotional intelligence, personal values, professional values.*

Summary. *The aim was to assess the relationship between emotional intelligence and personal and professional values of undergraduate student nurses.*

Methods. The Emotional Intelligence and Nursing Values questionnaires were applied with the Likert scale format used for the items. Emotional intelligence and values of student nurses were analyzed and compared using descriptive statistics with non-parametric correlation analysis to explore the relationship between specific variables.

The study was conducted with 203 students from 1st to 4th year of the nursing study programme at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences with the response rate of 99.0%. The survey was conducted from October through November 2019.

Results. The optimism was the highest rated characteristic of emotional intelligence. The strongest personal values of student nurses were intellectualism and altruism, while authority and intellectualism were the strongest professional values. A positive relationship was found between personal students' value of intellectualism and social skills, as well as between personal students' value of academic achievement and optimism. Personal value of altruism was positively related to emotional intelligence characteristics of social skills and utilization of emotions at weak and moderate levels, and negatively associated with optimism at the moderate level. Social skills directly correlated with the students' professional value of altruism.

Conclusions. Although emotional intelligence characteristics are quite similar in their expression among undergraduate student nurses, the importance of students' personal and professional values differs. All personal values, with exception of autonomy and altruism, were lower than respective professional values, and religiosity as personal and professional value was rated at the lowest. Emotional intelligence improves with the development of personal and professional value of altruism, and personal values of intellectualism and academic achievement. Future nurses should learn professional behaviour based on values and emotional intelligence through a role model of educators and mentors.

Introduction

Nursing is a profession that aims to help others. The nursing profession has the responsibility to carefully provide services to an individual, family and society in various situations, as soon as they need help. When providing nursing services, nurses face situations that require quick decision-making. Every decision relating to the care of a healthy or sick person should be made with respect for the life, dignity and individuality of the person (1). In recent years, due to technological and scientific advances, the rapidly growing world population, globalization, increasing life expectancy, and the increase in chronic diseases, society is paying more and more attention to the nursing profession (2). Expectations for nurses are related to professional, science-based knowledge, the ability to use technology, experience, the ability to adapt to changing conditions, and the improvement of professional qualifications. However, in the work of a nurse, it is important not only to perform manipulations perfectly, but also to take a holistic approach to the patient, ethics and value-based nursing (3). Nurses need to have the ethical knowledge to perform their function properly, manage situations and provide safe, appropriate, ethical care in an ever-changing world.

Institutions of higher education are facing the challenge of training nursing professionals who are able to practice nursing safely and effectively in a complex, ever-changing healthcare system. In order to properly train prospective nurses, nursing science has traditionally focused on competencies acquired through theoretical knowledge and skills acquisition (4). Emotional intelligence has only recently begun to be explored in the education process and its significance for better nursing practice. The concept of emotional intelligence became widely known after

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the psychologist Daniel Goleman's book "Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ" was published in 1995 (5). Goleman defined emotional intelligence as the array of skills and characteristics that drive leadership performance. The psychologist presented five components of emotional intelligence: self–awareness, self–regulation, internal motivation, empathy and social skills. To Goleman, emotional competencies can be learned and developed to achieve outstanding performance (6). It has been shown that emotional intelligence can predict the success of student nurses in clinical practice and academic achievement (7, 8). Emotional intelligence can be one of the key factors in fully preparing students for professional practice, as it can improve their ability to identify their own feelings and those of others and help to shape appropriate actions or responses to ongoing phenomena (9).

Freshwater and Stickley described emotional intelligence in nursing education as the essence of mastery and argued that the gaps in emotional intelligence in nursing study programmes are quite tangible. It is important to adjust study programmes so that not only the cognitive but also the emotional skills of students are developed, as the development of emotional intelligence can contribute to the development of nursing leadership, teaching and practice (10). In the teaching of student nurses, emotional intelligence should be included in profes-sional development courses and study programmes as a separate discipline. Besides, more experienced nurses should encourage young nurses to apply the principles of emotional intelligence in patient care (11). In addition to the transfer of knowledge and clinical experience, nursing study programmes should provide opportunities for students to develop their communication and emotional skills (12).

Professional values are defined as a set of values tailored to a specific professional group (13). They are a key resource that nursing professionals must follow when interacting with patients, colleagues and the public (14). Values that are important for the development of professional identity are also the basis for communication with healthy and sick individuals, colleagues, other healthcare profession-als and the public (15, 16). Nurses can provide hu-manistic, meaningful, respectful and effective care to patients as long as they understand their val-ues and know how those values can affect patient care. With the increasing number and complexity of ethical dilemmas in healthcare, fostering profes-sional values in nursing has become critical. Ethical and value-based teaching and clinical practice are already important in nursing studies, as the acqui-sition and internalization of values is the basis for fostering the nursing profession (17). Values can be introduced, modified and nurtured directly or indi-rectly through the learning process (18). Targeted integration of values into the nursing study process is important to ensure the future of nursing (19).

From the existing literature, it can be seen that there are studies in the world conducted with student nurses that examine professional values or emotional intelligence separately. There are some studies in Lithuania examining the values of student nurses (16, 20). There are also studies about emotional intelligence. These studies have investigated the influence of emotional intelligence for business and economics students' development of entrepreneurship (21), the role of emotional intelligence in project management in business companies (22) and relationship between emotional intelligence and health behaviours among students (23). However, research on emotional intelligence conducted with healthcare professionals, nurses and student nurses in particular has not been found; there is a lack of data on how student nurses develop their emotional intelligence and their personal and professional nursing values during their studies. The relationship between the values and emotional intelligence of student nurses has also been poorly researched by foreign authors.

Emotional intelligence is closely related to compassion and concern – the fundamental values of the nursing profession (24). It is essential for student nurses to learn through self–awareness studies so that they gain the right approach to nursing and behaviour and take responsibility for the integration of professional functions. It is important to acquire nursing values, caring nursing care and emotional intelligence skills in nursing studies that help to ensure effective learning through proper learning and role models. It is hoped that the results of this study will reveal differences in emotional intelligence, personal and professional nursing values among student nurses and help to understand the relationships between student nurses' emotional intelligence and nursing values. The research data will allow advancement in the process of nursing studies: improvement of the theoretical and practical training of student nurses based on values, as well as implementation of emotional intelligence in nursing studies and practice. The results of the study may also be useful in the development of further research.

The aim of the study was to determine the links between student nurses' emotional intelligence and personal and professional values.

Methods

Study Design. This was a descriptive comparative cross-sectional study. The study was conducted in October through November 2019 at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences.

Study Sample. Convenient study sample selection was employed for this study by inviting 205 nursing students from the 1st to the 4th year of the nursing study programme to participate. In total, 203 student nurses responded to the questionnaire with the response rate of 99.0%. The inclusion criterion for student nurses was a full-time nursing programme at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences.

Instrument. The Emotional Intelligence (Schutte, 1998) (25) and Nursing Values (Scott, 1959, and Johnson, 1983) (26) questionnaires were applied to measure student nurses' emotional intelligence and personal and professional values.

The Emotional Intelligence questionnaire was translated into the Lithuanian language and back following methodological considerations. The reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable as described by measures of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.896$). The Emotional Intelligence questionnaire consisted of 33 items and was divided in four sections: using emotional experience (optimism), understanding and analysing emotions (evaluation), expression of emotions (social skills) and utilization of emotions.

The Nursing Values questionnaire was translated into Lithuanian and adapted to Lithuanian culture (16). The reliability of the questionnaire was also acceptable as described by measures of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.782$). The Nursing Values questionnaire consisted of 57 items and was divided in two sections: personal and professional values. The five-point Likert scale format was used for all of the items.

Ethical Considerations. The study protocol was approved by the Committee on Bioethics at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (No. BEC-SL(B)-06). Participants received written information about the aim of the study and gave their informed consent by returning the questionnaire. Subjects had the right to refuse to participate in the study. The survey data are anonymous; the questionnaire did not ask for personal data that could identify the respondents.

Statistical Data Analysis. The data were recorded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS) version 26.0. Means and standard deviations of emotional intelligence and values of student nurses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Spearman correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between specific variables. Absolute values of correlation coefficient $r < 0.20$ were regarded as no or very weak correlation, between 0.20 and 0.29 as weak correlation, between 0.30 and 0.50 as moderate and > 0.5 as strong. The significance was defined by a *P* value of 0.05.

Results

According to personal characteristics of the students, their age varied from 18 to 48 years with the mean age of 21.4 years (SD ± 4.2 years, median – 21 years). The vast majority of the respondents were girls (97.5%). The largest part of the students was from the 1st year of nursing studies (27.1%). There were 26.6% of all students from the 2nd year, 24.1% from the 4th year, and the smallest part was from the 3rd year (22.2%).

The emotional intelligence, personal and professional student nurses' values were analyzed (Table 1). The emotional intelligence of student nurses was analyzed according to four characteristics: optimism, emotion appraisal, social skills and emotion utilisation. Although the mean scores of all emotional intelligence characteristics were quite similar among student nurses, the mean value for optimism was the highest among all students (3.9 ± 0.5), and the mean value for emotion appraisal was the lowest (3.7 ± 0.6).

It was found that the strongest personal value of the student nurses was intellectualism (4.2 ± 0.5), the weakest were autonomy (3.0 ± 0.6) and religiosity (3.2 ± 0.8). The means of all other values varied between 3.6 ± 0.6 and 3.9 ± 0.5 of 5 points. The strongest professional values of the student nurses were intellectualism (4.0 ± 0.7) and authority (4.0 ± 0.6), and the weakest were religiosity (2.0 ± 1.0) and self-control (2.4 ± 0.8) (Table 1). All personal values, with exception of autonomy and altruism, were lower than the respective professional values.

The strength of the relationship between the personal and professional values of student nurses and the characteristics of emotional intelligence was assessed. Correlations varied from very weak to moderate. The characteristics of emotional intelligence had the relationship with the personal value of altruism at the most extent. Positive correlations between the personal value of altruism and social skills ($r = 0.330$) and emotion utilization ($r = 0.223$) suggest that it is easier to express and manage emotions for those students who are more altruistic. Thus, a negative correlation between the personal value of altruism and optimism as the characteristic of emotional intelligence ($r = -0.311$) shows that students being altruistic have difficulties in relying on positive emotional experiences. The personal value of intelligence and the value of academic achievement had positive correlations with the characteristics of emotional intelligence: optimism and social skills. This suggests that the stronger the emotional intelligence is, the students more actively cultivate intellectual values of excellence, seek knowledge and are focused on academic achievement. Good social skills also contribute to the success during the study process (Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Student Nurses' Emotional Intelligence Characteristics, Personal
and Professional Nursing Values

	Means	SD	Lowest Means	Highest Means
Emotional Intelligence Characteristics				
Optimism	3.9	0.5	2.4	5.0
Emotion appraisal	3.7	0.6	1.7	4.9
Social skills	3.8	0.5	2.1	4.8
Emotion utilization	3.8	0.6	2.3	5.0
Personal Values				
Honesty	3.6	0.6	2.0	5.0
Religiosity	3.2	0.8	1.0	5.0
Intellectualism	4.2	0.5	2.6	5.0
Self-control	3.8	0.6	2.0	5.0
Academic achievement	3.8	0.5	2.0	5.0
Autonomy	3.0	0.6	1.8	5.0
Altruism	3.9	0.5	2.2	5.0
Professional Values				
Honesty	3.5	0.6	1.8	5.0
Religiosity	2.0	1.0	1.0	5.0
Intellectualism	4.0	0.7	2.0	5.0
Self-control	2.4	0.8	1.0	4.5
Academic achievement	3.7	0.8	1.5	5.0
Autonomy	2.5	1.1	1.0	5.0
Altruism	3.0	0.6	1.3	4.5
Paternalism	3.0	0.5	1.5	4.5
Authority	4.0	0.6	2.5	5.0

Table 2. Correlations between Emotional Intelligence Characteristics and Personal
and Professional Values of Student Nurses

	Optimism	Emotion Appraisal	Social Skills	Emotion Utilization
Personal Values				
Honesty	0.127	0.083	0.122	0.001
Religiosity	−0.060	−0.064	−0.142*	0.038
Intellectualism	0.181*	0.145*	**0.215***	0.068
Self-control	0.111	−0.044	0.150*	0.137
Academic achievement	**0.257***	0.172*	0.163*	0.049
Autonomy	−0.050	−0.063	-0.040	−0.104
Altruism	**−0.311***	−0.122	**0.330***	**0.223***
Professional Values				
Honesty	0.025	0.099	0.090	0.081
Religiosity	−0.065	−0.175*	0.005	0.005
Intellectualism	0.139*	0.137	0.135	0.114
Self-control	0.000	−0.015	−0.008	−0.032
Academic achievement	0.130	0.051	0.052	−0.021
Autonomy	−0.107	−0.083	−0.173*	−0.074
Altruism	0.152*	0.021	**0.201***	0.107
Paternalism	−0.088	−0.001	−0.020	−0.031
Authority	0.130	0.100	0.111	0.109

*$P < 0.05$, Spearman correlation coefficient.

The weak positive correlation was found between the professional value of altruism and social skills (r = 0.201). This suggests that the more students are able to express emotions, the more they foster altruism in the nursing profession. A few correlations between the professional values of altruism and the social skills as a characteristic of emotional intelligence demonstrate that the student nurses who promote an altruistic approach for their professional duties are able to express their emotions (Table 2).

Discussion

This study analyzed personal and professional values of student nurses and their relationship with the characteristics of emotional intelligence. The results revealed that the personal value of intellectualism among the student nurses was linked with social skills as a feature of emotional intelligence. The personal value of intellectualism is expressed through seeking new knowledge and higher education, an interest in different events and scientific achievements, as well as perception of art. All of this makes an individual more advanced and better prepared to reach the goals, overcome difficulties in real life and be more optimistic in relation to future developments.

The student nurses also acquired altruistic values personally and professionally that help them to develop social skills. It means that the value of altruism personally and professionally leads the student nurses to better ability to express their emotions. Besides, fostering a personal value of altruism can improve emotion utilisation skills and deteriorate optimism skills. This means that more altruistic student nurses could better manage their emotions but they fail in using positive emotional experience. Development of the ability of emotion expression is necessary for students who live in post-Soviet countries because of the past full of repressions and aggression. Altruism in this study was understood as the ability of the person to help others in their goals, friendly communicate with others and forgive other people for their mistakes, as well as the nurse's ability to work in a team, be helpful for colleagues and always approach a patient in a polite manner. It is evident that nurses' altruistic activities may be increased by a higher level of emotional intelligence (27).

The results about the relationship of emotional intelligence and better academic achievement were plausible: the students' ability to learn from their emotionally positive experiences was related to their value of academic excellence, and the ability of emotion expression was related to their personal intelligence value and that may lead them to a higher competence and better preparedness for professional qualification. The literature supports these findings with the results from other studies where academic progress had a positive relationship with the ability to rely on emotional experience (28), understand and analyze emotions (29). Other studies have shown that academic progress and intelligence are strongly connected with overall emotional intelligence: the higher the emotional intelligence, the higher the academic achievements (30–34). Thus, high emotional intelligence can help students not only to learn complex disciplines better. The competence of emotional intelligence supports students in coping with the anxiety and stress during assessments and helps to achieve better results when students are able to perceive anxiety and excitement, take advantage of previous positive emotional experiences and direct their emotions from negative to at least neutral and not distracting from concentration. However, our results that emotion management as a separate feature of emotional intelligence was not related to students' academic achievement is contradictory to the above discussion, but the explanation to this may be the young age of participants and short life experience that did not create enough possibilities for them to develop good skills of emotion management that is the highest and the most complicated characteristic of emotional intelligence (students still have the lowest score on understanding and analyzing emotions).

These results are important for the future research and development of emotional intelligence in schools and universities. To admit, there is a lack of emotional intelligence training and development in education in Lithuania. Lithuania has the second highest suicide rate in the world, and this issue is caused by disadaptation syndrome, according to Grigas (35). It means that this syndrome has a tendency to frustration, reckless self-deprecation, and most importantly, the inability to look for positive solutions to difficulties. Looking for positive solutions in difficult situations is one of the major abilities of emotional intelligence.

The results of the current study could also be important for improving nursing studies and practice. Future nurses should learn professional behaviour based on values and emotional intelligence through a role model of educators and mentors. The high professional nursing competence and strong skills of emotional intelligence would be helpful for quality of care, communication with colleagues and patients, as well as the psychological atmosphere in the working place. Nursing study programmes have to introduce a course for the development of emotional intelligence combining theoretical lectures and practical training. By being more emotionally educated, student nurses will be better accommodated to cope with their anxiety during the study process or while working in a

team at clinical placement and experiencing critical situations. Empathetic behaviour and social skills of future nurses are of the high importance for compassionate caring and person-centred approach in nursing. Finally, emotional intelligence with the strong skills of emotion management is essential for inspiring leadership, decision-making and problem-solving competence of nurses.

Conclusions

The nursing students are able to use their own positive emotional experiences at the most and they are least successful in understanding and analyzing emotions. The study revealed that although emotional intelligence characteristics are quite similar in their expression among undergraduate student nurses, the importance of students' personal and professional values differs. All personal values, with the exception of autonomy and altruism, were lower than the respective professional values, and religiosity as a personal and professional value was rated at the lowest.

Emotional intelligence was related to the personal and professional values of students, but not always in a positive way. Emotional intelligence improves with the development of the personal and professional value of altruism, as well as the personal values of intellectualism and academic achievement. Future nurses should learn professional behaviour based on values and emotional intelligence through a role model of educators and mentors.

Statement of Conflict of Interest
The authors state no conflict of interest.

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