

To Investigate the Current State of Professional Ethics and Professional Spirit Among Nurses

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Abstract: To investigate the current state of professional ethics and professional spirit among nurses. The descriptive-analytical study was conducted in the nursing department. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to select a sample of one hundred registered nurses affiliated with hospitals for participation. The sample size calculation was performed utilizing the sample size formula, with specified values of $r = 0.183$, a confidence level of 0.95, and a test power of 0.8. The maximum score for Professional Ethics was observed in the range of 47-69 (53%), whereas the highest Job Commitment Score was noted in the range of 60-90 (41%). The other observed ranges for Job Commitment Score were 23-46 (26%), 120-190 (38%), 70-115 (21%), and 0-60 (21%). The study's results indicated a robust association between nurses' elevated levels of professional ethics and their commitment to their respective institutions. Given the direct impact of nurses' work on patients' health, nursing managers must analyze how nurses' professional ethics and organizational commitment contribute to the company's success. Providing a comprehensive definition of ethical guidelines and in-service training courses to nurses may incentivize them to conform to ethical principles and enhance their level of commitment to the organization.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Professional Ethics; Organizational Commitment; Decision-Making of Nurses; Fundamental Component; Healthcare Systems; Human Capital.

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1. Introduction

A company's human capital is considered its most valuable asset. Nurses are a fundamental component of healthcare systems, comprising the largest and most valuable workforce element. Ethics is the field of inquiry that examines moral judgments grounded in the values, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals and communities. The concept of "ethics" pertains to the fundamental values and standards that guide the conduct and decision-making of nurses in their professional practice [1]. Nurses possess a significant level of independence and autonomy in decision-making regarding patient care. Without directives from a physician, the nurse is afforded the autonomy to exercise her professional judgment. [2] The contemporary nursing field has attained this feat due to its triumph in providing its members with a rigorous education, thereby empowering nurses to provide specialized care and champion the cause of their patients. Consequently, increased autonomy in the nursing field necessitates heightened levels of accountability and responsibility.

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The autonomy granted to professionals must consistently adhere to a predetermined set of ethical and moral principles. Individuals contemplating a profession in nursing require additional guidance and education beyond the conventional curriculum offered in nursing institutions. Although ethics and values in nursing may not be explicitly incorporated in introductory courses, this is the norm for most nursing degree programs. There is a possibility that this approach may not suffice in promoting the cultivation of proficient and ethically sound nurses. In the United States, those who educate nurses possess both the authority and responsibility to mold the ethical standards of their pupils about nursing ethics, ethical analysis, and ethical decision-making. Educating nurses about moral and ethical issues in the profession shouldn't be limited to classroom settings. Experienced nurses with a strong moral compass can be valuable mentors and preceptors in clinical settings by imparting ethical principles and values through role modeling and supervision. Acquiring significant nursing competence through ethical and values orientation necessitates extensive experiences and supervision from mentors, preceptors, and supervisors. Regrettably, the Gambia conforms to the pattern of elevated attrition rates among experienced nursing professionals that afflicts numerous developing nations due to inadequate labor conditions and remuneration [3].

The current dynamic transformations in the healthcare sector have engendered skepticism regarding the efficacy of administering medical interventions that align with established ethical principles. In essence, professional ethics encompass a collection of principles and directives that dictate appropriate conduct for individuals and organizations across diverse contexts. Disregarding the principles of professional ethics, which serve as a means of determining an organization's values, could raise questions regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of the organization's activities. The healthcare industry's human resource management progressively emphasizes employee agency and adherence to industry standards and codes of ethics [4]-[5]. As per the International Council of Nurses (ICN), nurses prioritize ethical planning and practice to safeguard themselves against ethical dilemmas within healthcare establishments while also advancing the cause of public health and welfare [6]. The failure of healthcare organizations to uphold professional ethics and adhere to ethical norms may pose challenges for nurses, potentially resulting in reduced collaboration, job discontent, and unfavorable interpersonal dynamics with colleagues [7]. Several studies have suggested that nurses exhibit a limited dedication to ethical practice. Bah et al. [6] reported the presence of inadequate ethical commitment and non-compliance with rules among nurses. Disregarding ethical considerations can create a conflict between nurses and their values, potentially resulting in emotional disengagement from patients and a diminished commitment to delivering care.

The commitment of an employee to an organization may be influenced by their adherence to professional ethics and values. Organizations seldom succeed until they institutionalize their ideas and adhere to professional ethics. Organizational commitment includes adherence to the organization's values and objectives, allegiance, ethical obligations, individual interests, and a desire to remain affiliated. Elevated levels of commitment in the professional setting are observed when individuals identify their identity with their job, exhibit a sense of satisfaction in being associated with the organization, and recognize the advantages and perks associated with their role [9]. Promoting an environment that fosters employee engagement and development can yield positive outcomes for an organization's ethical standards, workforce drive, and overall efficiency [8].

A nurse's degree of organizational commitment is critical to their tenure with a healthcare institution, attrition rates, absenteeism, workplace conflicts, stress levels, and clinical performance. Fostering effective human resources in the health sector by engaging nursing staff with strong organizational commitment is a formidable challenge. This is because nurses' insufficient organizational commitment may have a negative impact on their performance and the quality of service they provide [10]-[12]. The study conducted by Safari and Yoosef [13] in Iran revealed that heightened levels of organizational commitment among nurses were positively associated with improved quality of patient care. The present study was conducted by clinical educators and nurses who possess extensive knowledge regarding the shortcomings of healthcare establishments in adhering to ethical standards and sustaining institutional dedication. Furthermore, the individual possesses first-hand knowledge regarding the repercussions of disregarding ethical standards in the workplace and the importance of upholding a collective commitment to organizational values.

2. Materials and Method

The descriptive-analytical study was conducted in the nursing department. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to select a sample of one hundred registered nurses affiliated with hospitals for participation. The sample size calculation was performed utilizing the sample size formula, with specified values of $r = 0.183$, a confidence level of 0.95, and a test power of 0.8. The computation, as mentioned earlier, was employed within the Medcalc software. The comparative investigation produced the subsequent outcomes [14]:

Criteria for inclusion: The prerequisites for participation in the study require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in nursing and active licensure as a registered nurse [15].

Criteria for exclusion: Subjects who declined to persist in attending or who completed all survey items were excluded from the study.

The institutional ethics committee granted permission to deviate from ethical norms. Before commencing the study, an introductory letter was dispatched to each participant, elucidating the aim of the inquiry and the methodology that would be employed to collect data. Subsequently, each participant provided their informed written consent and was provided with assurances regarding the confidentiality of their data and the voluntary nature of their participation in the research.

The researchers employed a Petty professional ethics questionnaire, an Allen-Meyer organizational commitment questionnaire, and a demographic information questionnaire to gather information. Hill & Petty [16] devised a professional ethics questionnaire comprising four dimensions: work engagement, work interest, work perseverance, and decent human connections in the workplace. The questionnaire’s potential score range spanned from 23 to 115, wherein elevated scores indicated a more profound dedication to professional ethics. The results indicated that individuals who scored between 23 and 46 exhibited substandard levels of professional ethics. On the other hand, those who scored between 47 and 69 demonstrated moderate levels of professional ethics. Finally, individuals who scored between 70 and 115 indicated high levels of professional ethics.

A panel of experts validated the questionnaire’s concept and content validity, while its construct validity was established through factor analysis. The Cronbach’s alpha scale yielded a score of 0.96 for the overall internal consistency of this instrument. The study reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for various constructs related to work, including interest in work, perseverance in work, positive human connections at work, participation in work, and involvement in work. The obtained values for Cronbach’s alpha were 0.85, 0.79, 0.87, and 0.74, respectively. Furthermore, it was demonstrated by Sheikhzakaryaie and Atashzadeh-Shoorideh that the instrument’s overall reliability amounted to 85%. The study reported reliability indices for four distinct variables on positive human relationships: perseverance, interest, and participation in work. The respective reliability indices for these variables were 79%, 91%, 84%, and 86% [17].

The Allen-Meyer Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (1990) consists of 24 questions categorized into three primary dimensions: affective, continuation, and normative commitment. The affective dimension pertains to the individual’s emotional attachment to the organization, while the continuation dimension encompasses the costs associated with leaving the job. Lastly, the normative commitment dimension refers to the individual’s obligation to remain with the organization. Normative commitment pertains to the extent of an individual’s emotional investment in an organization, as demonstrated by their sense of obligation and duty to remain within the organization. The potential range of scores for the participants is between 24 and 168. The study revealed that a score ranging from 120 to 190 indicated a significant degree of organizational commitment, while a score of 60 to 90 indicated a moderate level of commitment. Conversely, a score ranging from 0 to 60 indicated a low level of organizational commitment.

The emotional component exhibited a dependability value of 0.86, while the continuation and normative commitment components displayed dependability values of 0.79 and 0.75, respectively. The questionnaire’s validity was confirmed by evaluating a group of twenty industry professionals, and its structural validity was established through confirmatory factor analysis [18]-[19]. Nabizadeh et al. [20] analyzed internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient in their study. The researchers derived the values of ($\alpha = 0.87$) for the overall instrument, ($\alpha = 0.82$) for emotional commitment, ($\alpha = 0.89$) for continuous commitment, and ($\alpha = 0.75$) for the normative commitment component from the collected data. The study employed the retest technique at 14-day intervals to assess the instrument’s stability. The results indicated a stability coefficient of 0.89 for all organizational commitment instruments. Additionally, the dimensions of continuous, emotional, and normative commitment demonstrated stability coefficients of 0.93, 0.93, and 0.87, respectively [20].

3. Statistical Analysis

SPSS 25.0 was used to analyse the data. Analytical statistics like the t-test and the Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients were used alongside descriptive statistics like percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to verify that the data were normally distributed. The predetermined level of 5% significance was deemed enough (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Professional Ethics Score

Professional ethics Score	
23-46	Low
47-69	Moderate
70-115	Good

Table 2: Job Commitment

Job Commitment scores	
120-190	High
60-90	Moderate
0-60	Low

4. Results

Out of 100 nurses, the majority, specifically 74%, were identified as female. Additionally, 59% of the nurses were reported as married, while a significant proportion of 87% held a bachelor's degree. The study found that the average age of nurses was 29.77 ± 4.77 years, while their average work experience was 7.11 ± 2.44 years, as presented in Table 3.

Based on the independent t-test results, no significant difference was observed in the mean ratings of professional ethics and organizational commitment between groups categorized by gender and marital status. The study findings revealed a significant variation in the level of organizational commitment among the participants based on their educational attainment. Specifically, nurses with bachelor's degrees exhibited a higher degree of organizational commitment, as presented in Table 4. The results indicate that nurses exhibited high professional ethics, as evidenced by the overall mean score of 104.70 ± 8.91 . The results indicate that the dimension of persistence in work received the highest rating ($M = 29.95$, $SD = 5.66$), while the dimension of relations in work received the lowest rating ($M = 25.12$, $SD = 2.99$). The study found that the participants' mean scores in the areas of interest in work and involvement in work were 26.62 ± 4.43 and 29.98 ± 3.79 , respectively. The average value for the overall level of organizational commitment was found to be robust, with a mean score of 97.70 ± 9.96 .

The component of continuation commitment was found to have the highest mean score (38.55 ± 11.14), whereas the normative (32.62 ± 6.63) and emotional commitment (33.62 ± 8.84) dimensions exhibited the lowest mean scores. There exists a direct correlation between professional ethics and job interest. Moreover, the study found a weak correlation between organizational commitment and emotional and normative dimensions. The results in Tables 5 to 8 indicate a tenuous and direct correlation between professional ethics and normative dimension with organizational commitment. According to the data presented in Table 9, the maximum score for Professional Ethics was observed in the range of 47-69 (53%), whereas the highest Job Commitment Score was noted in the range of 60-90 (41%). The other observed ranges for Job Commitment Score were 23-46 (26%), 120-190 (38%), 70-115 (21%), and 0-60 (21%).

Table 3: Participant's demographic information

Gender	Number	%
Male	26	26
Female	74	74
Age		
Below 25	38	38
25-35	43	43
above 35	19	19
Mean	29.77 ± 4.77	
Marital status		
Married	59	59
Unmarried	41	41
Education		
Graduate	87	87
Post Graduate	13	13
Employment		
Temporarily	67	67
Permanent	33	33
Work experience(Years)		
0-3	23	23
3-5	42	42
More than 5	35	35

Table 4: Correlation between demographic profile and professional ethic and institutional commitment

Parameter		Organizational commitment		Professional ethics	
Age		r = 0.12 P = 0.05		r = 0.04 P = 0.31	
working experiences		r = - 0.45 P = 0.22		r = - 0.04 P = 0.36	
Sex	Male	95.89±7.85	r= -0.002 P=0.55	103.64±8.98	r = - 0.06 P =0.22
	Female	94.22±7.78		103.11±9.63	
	P-value	0.63		0.55	
Marital status	Single	94.88±10.14	r = 0.62 P=0.24	102.62±7.66	r = - 0.05 P = 0.53
	Married	98.24±6.66		103.34±5.54	
	P-value	0.42		0.62	
Educational level	Graduate	97.69±8.44	r = - 0.15 P=0.07	105.33±3.34	r = - 0.003 P =0.44
	Post graduate	87.71±5.11		103.21±6.47	
	P-value	0.003		0.52	

*Pearson correlation coefficient and 0.01 significance level were employed.

**Spearman correlation coefficient and 0.01 significance level were employed.

***The significance level was 0.05 for the independent t-test.

Table 5: Nurses' organisational commitment and professional ethics

Professional ethics	Commitment			
	Organizational	Affective	Continuance	Normative
R	0.187	0.246	0.53	0.18
P	0.03	0.004	0.22	0.02

Table 6: Professional ethics and work interest correlation

Interest in work	Commitment			
	Organizational	Affective	Continuance	Normative
R	0.42	0.53	0.07	0.23
P	0.03	0.01	0.43	0.04

Table 7: Professional ethics and work endurance

Perseverance in work	Commitment			
	Organizational	Affective	Continuance	Normative
R	0.15	0.08	0.06	0.15
P	0.07	0.10	0.20	0.03

Table 8: Professional ethics and workplace HR

Human relations at work	Commitment			
	Organizational	Affective	Continuance	Normative
R	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03
P	0.29	0.43	0.18	0.48

Table 9: Professional Ethics Score and Job Commitment Scores

Professional Ethics Score	Number	%
23-46	26	26
47-69	53	53
70-115	21	21
Job Commitment Scores		
0-60	21	21
60-90	41	41
120-190	38	38

5. Discussion

Nursing professionals encounter ethical predicaments daily, necessitating applying. Hence, imparting nursing ethics and values education should occur within a clinical setting to ensure that the graduates are proficient in their practical application. Benner et al. [21] assert that cultivating ethical conduct in interpersonal and relational abilities necessitates meticulous deliberation, robust curriculum and pedagogical advancement, and thorough preparation.

Nursing is widely regarded as a highly esteemed and respected occupation, which owes much of its progress to the pioneering efforts of Florence Nightingale. The “Nightingale Pledge,” a code of ethics for the nursing profession, is the earliest known code in history [22]. The nursing ethics code offers direction on appropriate conduct through its four fundamental principles. The nursing code of ethics comprises various elements, such as the interactions between nurses and patients, the interactions between nurses and their peers, the nursing profession, and the general public. According to the first principle concerning nurses and people, the foremost duty of a nurse is to cater to the needs of individuals requiring nursing care. While administering care, the nurse must foster an atmosphere that upholds the patient, family, and society’s human rights, privacy, values, customs, and spiritual beliefs.

The article posits that nurses should exhibit professional attributes such as respect, responsiveness, compassion, trustworthiness, and integrity, both within and outside their work environment. The nurse-patient interaction necessitates both professionalism and adherence to ethical standards. Regrettably, a significant proportion of nurses’ lack awareness of this ethical dimension. Nurses widely accept that obtaining patient consent is not required for routine nursing interventions, such as measuring vital signs or performing basic hygiene tasks, unless the procedure is invasive or surgical. According to a media report, there are allegations that nurses exhibit unprofessional behavior toward patients and their families and disregard the importance of obtaining informed consent. Consistent with the findings of Sawo et al. [23] regarding workplace violence directed toward nurses, it has been demonstrated that nurses are often the target of attacks from patients’ relatives due to their derogatory language towards them. If there were greater awareness regarding the legal entitlements of nurses, a significant number of licenses would likely be revoked.

Various avenues exist through which a patient’s confidentiality may be breached while providing nursing care. In certain public hospitals, the delivery rooms lack designated areas for laboring mothers and instead resemble conventional wards. The female patients in this particular obstetric unit can observe their medical care. In their study, Aguerd et al. [24] found comparable results in Morocco. They identified several factors that impeded the delivery of quality nursing care, including insufficient resources, inadequate communication between nurses and patients, disregard for privacy norms during dressing and urine sample collection, and non-compliance with care execution rules in the domains of communication, information, and patient welfare. Studies conducted on the societal perception of the nursing profession in Nigeria have corroborated the existence of unfavorable stereotypes associated with the occupation. The provision of care is a fundamental component of the nursing profession. It is highly esteemed by patients due to its ability to promote health and well-being, surpassing the benefits of curative interventions.

Patients’ perceptions regarding a compassionate nurse appear to be associated with the assumptions of high-quality nursing care. Regrettably, a significant segment of nurses lack knowledge or disregard for the ethical principles regulating interactions between nurses and patients. According to Ulrich et al. [25], most nurses, exceeding sixty percent, reported that patient rights, autonomy, and informed consent were prevalent or recurring concerns in their practice. Frequent discussion topics included advanced care planning, surrogate decision-making, end-of-life decision-making, and violations of confidentiality. The study by Pavlish et al. [26] revealed that issues such as unnecessary pain and suffering, challenging decision-making processes, and disregard for patient autonomy were identified as problematic. The second segment of the code of ethics pertains to the professional obligations of the nurse.

As mentioned earlier, the statement highlights the significance of the nurse's responsibility toward nursing practice, which encompasses the maintenance of competence through continuous education. Additionally, it emphasizes the nurse's duty to cultivate a practice culture that prioritizes honesty and transparency. The global pursuit of improved healthcare quality in nursing is currently informed by various nursing concepts, such as nursing ethics, the nursing process, evidence-based practice, best practices, advanced nursing practice, and reflective practice, which are all influenced by the educational levels of nurses. All of these factors have a negative impact on the second component and the underlying principles of the code of ethics and values.

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of nurses' ethical practices on their loyalty towards their employers. The results of this study are consistent with those of a study conducted in Iran by Dehghani et al. [27], which reported that nurses exhibited a significant level of professional ethics. This implies that nurses are inclined to abide by ethical principles. Research conducted in Uganda revealed that the nurses in the region possessed a limited understanding of ethical principles [28]. A study carried out in Iran demonstrated that the nurses possessed only a moderate level of understanding of ethical principles, indicating that they were not utilizing a diverse range of readily accessible pertinent resources, such as international and national codes of ethics in the nursing field, to their fullest potential [29]. Possible rationales for the contradiction between our results and prior research may stem from variances in the participants' demographics and the approach employed to assess the ethical conduct of professionals. Various factors, such as the nursing education system, the attitudes and perspectives of the system toward nurses, and societal and cultural elements, influence the issue of professional ethics.

The study found a positive correlation between work perseverance and interpersonal skills and higher mean scores in professional ethics. Conversely, lower scores in these categories were associated with less ethical behavior. The nursing profession demands that nurses provide exceptional care to patients, even in the face of challenges such as imperfections, extended work hours, and a shortage of healthcare personnel. This may explain the notable perseverance exhibited by nurses in their work.

Insufficient nurse-patient ratios and nurses' diminished motivation, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and lack of professional interest may contribute to suboptimal human relations evaluations. By adhering to fundamental standards of ethics and social decency, nurse managers can establish a positive example for other healthcare workers and contribute to enhancing workplace relationships [30].

Studies conducted in Iran and other regions have established that the average level of organizational commitment among participants is notably high [31]-[33]. Employees who exhibit greater organizational commitment tend to demonstrate reduced rates of absenteeism and tardiness, a particularly crucial aspect in high-pressure industries such as nursing. According to research, employees with a profound emotional attachment to their organization are inclined to exhibit work-related pride, sustained motivation, and active participation in the company's achievements. In contrast to certain studies, a significant proportion of nurses in other studies exhibited only moderate commitment to their respective organizations [35]-[36]. Based on our research, the primary determinant of commitment is an individual's readiness to persist with training. As a result, we posited that providing additional and lengthier training sessions, such as in-service courses, would result in a greater average commitment rating [35]. Demonstrating unwavering commitment is evident when an individual weighs the advantages and disadvantages of departing from the organization. Employees with a high level of commitment tend to persist in their current job roles due to their reluctance to squander the valuable knowledge and expertise they have acquired within their present organization. This line of thinking could potentially result in the organization having to manage disengaged, creative, and resourceful staff members.

The present study suggests that participants in Iran may have adapted to the current situation in their nursing profession to avoid the financial consequences of leaving their organization, which may be attributed to the country's low nursing wage and economic challenges. A study on Iranian nurses revealed a significant correlation between the normative commitment component and the lowest mean score of organizational commitment [20]. Normative commitment refers to the situation where employees are inclined to remain with their organization due to a sense of moral obligation. The reinforcement of normative commitment within a work environment can be achieved through various measures, including providing in-service training, allocating tasks based on individual skill sets, and continuously evaluating employees' contributions [34].

The findings of this investigation demonstrated a strong association between ethical conduct within the work environment and allegiance to the employing entity. Several studies have established a correlation between the sense of professional and ethical autonomy and the level of commitment demonstrated by nurses towards their respective organizations [33]-[37]. Conversely, a study on nurses in Iran indicated no statistically significant association between professional ethics and organizational loyalty. According to the study, employees exhibited enhanced performance and knowledge acquisition in an environment that upheld ethical standards [38]. The authors Karami et al. [9] underscored the importance of hospital managers engaging in strategic planning to enhance the quality of nursing care and ultimately improve patient outcomes.

The current study found a significant association between the possession of a bachelor's degree and the level of organizational commitment exhibited by nurses. The findings were consistent with the study conducted by Nabizadeh et al. [20], while in contrast, they were incongruent with the research conducted by Shoorideh et al. [17]. There is a significant demand for nurses who have completed graduate-level education and hold doctorate degrees at academic and scientific institutions in Iran. Furthermore, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree constrains employment opportunities for nurses, compelling them to persist in clinical settings and augmenting their dependence on healthcare establishments.

In order to cultivate an atmosphere that promotes professional ethics and organizational commitment among nurses, managers must contemplate the allocation of authority, the clarification of roles, and the equitable evaluation of employee performance. To enhance nurses' proficiency and elevate the healthcare provision standard, the governing bodies must reinforce their dedication to ethical principles and organizational loyalty using instructional programs. The utilization of self-report questionnaires was identified as a limitation of the present study. As a potential solution, future research endeavors may consider incorporating interviews and observations to enhance the dependability of the findings.

6. Conclusion

The study's findings showed a strong correlation between nurses' high degrees of professional ethics and their dedication to their respective institutions. Nursing managers must analyze how nurses' professional ethics and organizational dedication contribute to the business's success, given the direct impact of nurses' work on patients' health. Nurses may be encouraged to adhere to ethical principles and increase their devotion to the organization if given a thorough definition of ethical principles and in-service training sessions. The study's findings showed a strong correlation between nurses' high degrees of professional ethics and their dedication to their respective institutions. Nursing managers must analyze how nurses' professional ethics and organizational dedication contribute to the business's success, given the direct impact of nurses' work on patients' health. Nurses may be encouraged to adhere to ethical principles and increase their devotion to the organization if given a thorough definition of ethical principles and in-service training sessions. Every day, nursing professionals face moral dilemmas that require them to apply their knowledge, discernment, and understanding of ethical principles to a particular situation to develop the most effective course of action. Nursing ethics and values education should be imparted in a clinical setting to guarantee that graduates are skilled in their practical application. According to Benner et al., careful consideration, significant curriculum and pedagogical improvement, and rigorous planning are all necessary to develop ethical behaviour in interpersonal and relational capacities.

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Data Availability Statement: The research contains data related to professional ethics and organizational commitment among nurses. The utilization of self-report questionnaires was identified as a limitation of the present study. As a potential solution, future research endeavours may consider incorporating interviews and observations to enhance the dependability of the findings.

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