

ASSERTIVENESS AMONG NURSING STUDENTS OF A NURSING INSTITUTE IN KATHMANDU

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ABSTRACT

Background: Assertiveness is a key attribute for successful nursing practice. A professional nurse must be assertive for improving nursing care so it should be emphasized during their academic period. The objective of the study was to find out the assertiveness among nursing students in Kathmandu.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study design with 71 nursing students of Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) in Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences was conducted between 27th April, 2022 to 27th May 2022. Non-probability sampling technique was used to select the sample. Assertiveness Scale of Begley and Glacken, a self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection which was distributed to the respondents by mail. Data analysis and interpretation was done using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Result: The result showed that majority of the respondents (87.3%) had moderate level of assertiveness and very least respondents (4.2%) had high level of assertiveness. Respondents were found to be more assertive who enjoy to start conversations with strangers (3.75 ± 0.61), who are always frank about their feelings (3.57 ± 0.92) and never find difficult to compliment and praise friends (2.97 ± 1.01). However, they were less assertive in trying to avoid conflict (1.45 ± 1.41), never disagree when a friends' opinion is wrong (1.63 ± 1.00) and are more careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings (1.24 ± 0.68). There is no significant association between level of assertiveness with sociodemographic variables.

Conclusion: The findings of the study conclude that the majority of respondents were less assertive in avoiding conflict, disagreeing to friends' opinion and careful to avoid hurting other people's feeling. So, the concerned academic organization should emphasis more on encouraging assertiveness among the nursing students.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Nursing Students

INTRODUCTION

Assertive communication is an important quality/skill in the global workplace. Assertive behavior is crucial for nurses to manage the challenges they face dealing with human resources. Nurses have to be assertive enough in order to preserve right of nurses as well as for clients who is seeking the nursing care. In order to achieve the client's progress and effective nurse-patient relationship, assertiveness is necessary. Assertive nurse is always confident, listens to others, always is clear to other, and not confused with any issue. Moreover, it is easier for an assertive nurse to hand-over duties and communicate with patients and other health professionals. Therefore, assertiveness should be enhanced during their academic period as they will ultimately become the professional nurses in the future ¹.

A lack of assertive communication is a recurring issue in critical incidents. According to Joint Commission, lack of assertive communication was identified as causative factor for delays in treatment, medication errors and incorrect procedures in United States ². A study conducted in six Danish hospitals found that occurrence of 524 adverse patient incidence in 2010-2017 as a result of health professionals (23%) not being able to speak up when concerned about patient ³.

Students with low assertiveness show negative professional attitude and behavior when they graduate. So, it is compulsory for nursing faculty students, to have high assertiveness in order to be able to use their professional knowledge and skills more effectively ⁴. Not only this, nurses experience high stress, low self-esteem and anxiety. A descriptive study conducted among bachelor nursing students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences showed that 55.6% of the students had average to low levels of assertiveness and 38.7% had mild to severe depression. The results showed a significant statistical relationship between depression and assertiveness ($p < 0.001$). So, it is compulsory for nursing faculty students to have high assertiveness in order to be able to use their professional knowledge and skills more effectively ⁵.

In a study conducted in India, 60% of the students lacked assertiveness and this shortcoming had negatively affected practical learning and performance of 40% of the students ⁶. Similarly, a study conducted in Tamil Nadu, India showed 50% of the nursing students were assertive and only 38.3% had good academic performance. The presence of low assertiveness results in interrupted educational performance ⁷.

Today's nursing students are tomorrow's professional nurses, so they should be assertive for delivering quality care to clients during their academic period in clinical postings or while working in hospital after their graduation. It is necessary to understand the importance of assertiveness and its significant role in health care system. Therefore, this study aims to visualize the concept of assertive behavior in academic field of student nurses.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional research study was conducted in Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences, Soalteemode, Kathmandu. Non-Probability Purposive Sampling technique was

performed to select 71 sample size. PCL Nursing second and third-year students (total 82) of Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences were the eligible population for the study.

A structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. Standard validated Begley and Glacken Assertiveness Questionnaire was used to collect information related to assertiveness. Permission was taken from the author. Begley and Glacken (2004) Assertiveness Questionnaire was developed by Begley and Glacken in 2004. It contains 28 items out of which 11 are described as positive and 17 of them as negative. Each item scored on a four-point Likert scale from always 4 to never 1. The total score ranged from 28 to 112.

Level of Assertiveness is categorized as:

Low assertiveness: Score range= 28-54

Moderate assertiveness: Score range= 55-83

High assertiveness: Score range= 84-112 (Begley & Glacken, 2004).

The study was conducted between 27th April, 2022 to 27th May 2022. Data was collected through self-administered technique via e-mail using online questionnaire distributed through google form to the respondents. For Ethical Considerations, Formal administrative approval was obtained from Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences, Institutional Review Committee (IRCs) and Itahari, Sub-Metropolitan city. Verbal and written informed consent were obtained from each participant. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) was used to identify assertiveness among nursing students. Inferential statistics (Fishers test) was used to measure the association between the dependent and independent variables.

RESULTS

The mean age of the respondents was 18.63 ± 1.379 years. There was domination of Brahmin/Chhetri consisting of 56.63 % and majority of the respondents (76.1%) were ascribed to Hindu religion. Most (74.0%) of the respondents were from urban area. In relation to type of family, 74.6% were from nuclear family and almost all the respondents (97.2%) were unmarried. In addition, 40.8% were first child of their parents and have only one sibling (39.4%). Most of the respondents (93.0%) had both of their parents alive (Table 1)

Majority (95.8%) of the respondents had interest in nursing study. About 87.3% of the respondent's reason to join nursing was for opportunity to work internationally. More than half (52.1%) of the respondents were from third year. In addition, majority (59.2%) respondents obtained distinction in previous year (Table 2)

Table 1: Socio-demographic Information of the Respondents

Variable	Number	Percentage
Age (in years)		
≤18	64	90.1
>18	7	9.9
Mean±SD (18.63±1.379)		
Religion		
Hindu	54	76.1
Buddhist	15	21.1
Christian	1	1.4
Kirat	1	1.4
Ethnicity		
Dalit	2	2.8
Janajati	28	39.4
Madhesi	1	1.4
Brahmin/Chhetri	40	56.3
Residence		
Urban	54	76.1
Rural	17	23.9
Type of family		
Nuclear	53	74.6
Joint	18	25.3
Marital status		
Married	2	2.8
Unmarried	69	97.2
Birth order		
First child	29	40.8
Second child	23	32.4
Third and above	19	26.8
Number of siblings		
No siblings	0	0
One sibling	27	38.0
Two siblings	25	35.2
Three and above siblings	19	26.8
Parents alive		
Father and mother	66	93.0
Only father	3	4.2
Only mother	1	1.4
None of them	1	1.4

Table 2: Respondent's Academic- related Variables

Variables	Number	Percentage
Interest in Nursing Study		
Yes	68	95.8
No	3	4.2
Reason to join nursing*		
Voluntarily	22	31.0
With guidance of family	29	40.8
Opportunity to work internationally	62	87.3
Job guarantee	28	39.4
Current year of study		
Second year	34	47.9
Third year	37	52.1
Academic Grade Obtained in Previous Year		
Distinction	42	59.2
First Division	28	39.4
Second Division	1	1.4

*Multiple response

About 59.7% always enjoy to start conversations with acquaintances and strangers with a mean±SD value of 3.75±0.61. Likewise, 37.0% never find difficult to compliment and praise friends and acquaintances with a mean±SD value 2.97 ±1.0. Both the statements indicate students to be more assertive. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (78.1%) always try to avoid conflict at work with a mean±SD score of 1.45±1.41 and 64.3% never disagree when a friend's opinion is wrong with a mean±SD score 1.63±1.00 indicating to be less assertive.

Table. 3: The Scale for Measuring Assertiveness (Items 1-14)

Statements	A (%)	O (%)	R (%)	N (%)	$\bar{x} \pm \sigma$
At work I tend to keep my feelings to myself.*	41 (58.9)	15(20.5)	13(17.8)	2 (2.7)	1.67±0.88
I feel uncomfortable asking a colleague to do a favor for me. *	22 (32.9)	11(15.1)	20(27.4)	18(24.7)	2.5 ±1.20
I find it difficult to compliment and praise friends and acquaintances. *	9 (12.3)	14(19.2)	23(31.5)	25(37.0)	2.97±1.01
If a senior colleague made an unreasonable request, I would refuse.	13 (17.8)	11(15.1)	28(41.1)	19(26.0)	2.26 ±1.05
I enjoy starting conversations with acquaintances and strangers.	42 (59.7)	14(19.7)	6 (8.4)	9(12.6)	3.75 ±0.61

I find criticism from friends and acquaintances hard to take. *	14 (19.2)	16(21.9)	19(26.0)	22(32.9)	2.75 ±1.12
I want to know what my rights are in the work situation.	59 (83.6)	7 (9.6)	4 (5.5)	1 (1.4)	3.1 ±1.08
If a friend makes an unreasonable request, I would find it difficult to refuse. *	25 (37.0)	18(24.7)	15(20.5)	13(17.8)	2.3 ±1.59
I would feel uncomfortable paying a compliment to junior colleague. *	9 (12.3)	12(16.4)	25(35.2)	25(35.2)	2.6 ±0.74
If I was busy, I would ignore the demands of senior colleague.	41 (56.2)	18(24.7)	11(15.1)	3 (4.1)	1.67 ±0.88
When I know a friend's opinion is wrong, I would disagree with him/her.	7 (9.6)	4 5.5)	15(20.5)	45(64.4)	1.63 ±1.00
At work, I feel unsure what to say when I'm praised. *	14 (19.2)	26(38.4)	24(32.9)	7 (9.6)	2.32 ±0.89
I tend to be over-apologetic to friends and acquaintances. *	13 (17.8)	19(26.0)	22(32.9)	17(23.3)	2.61 ±1.03
I try to avoid conflict at work. *	55 (78.1)	9 (12.3)	5 (6.8)	2 (2.8)	1.45 ±1.41

*Indicates negative statement, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 4: The Scale for Measuring Assertiveness (Items 15-28)

Statements	n = 71				Mean ± SD
	A(%)	O(%)	R(%)	N(%)	
I'm very careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings. *	61(85.9)	4 (5.5)	4 (5.5)	2 (2.7)	1.24 ±0.68
In a group, I make the decisions.	7 (9.6)	31(45.2)	28(38.4)	5(6.8)	2.39 ±0.93
I would ask for constructive criticism about my work.	14(19.2)	22(32.9)	20(27.4)	15(20.5)	2.53 ±1.02
When I'm with my friends, I am frank and honest about my feelings.	48(68.5)	2 (2.7)	16(21.9)	5(6.9)	3.57 ±0.92
If a colleague upsets a patient, I would challenge him/her about it.	19(28.8)	13(17.8)	22(30.1)	17(23.3)	2.52 ±1.14
If I disagreed with a decision made by a senior colleague, I would tell him/her.	24(35.6)	15(20.5)	22(30.1)	10(13.7)	2.8 ± 1.08
At work, I avoid asking questions for fear of sounding stupid. *	25(37.0)	14(19.2)	19(26.0)	13(17.8)	2.49 ± 2.57
I feel uncomfortable asking friends to do favour for me. *	16(21.9)	19(26.0)	13(17.8)	23(34.2)	2.64 ± 1.17
When someone pays me a compliment, I feel unsure of what to say. *	24(32.9)	18(26.0)	22(30.1)	8 (11.0)	2.2 ± 1.02
If I was impressed by the actions of senior colleague, I would tell him/ her.	48(68.5)	4 (5.5)	17(23.3)	2(2.7)	3.39 ± 1.06

I tend to be over-apologetic to colleagues. *	13(17.8)	23(32.9)	25(34.2)	11(15.1)	2.47 ± 0.94
I tend to be over-concerned about patients' welfare. *	44(63.0)	20(27.4)	6 (8.2)	1 (1.4)	1.47 ± 0.70
I would feel uncomfortable expressing annoyance at a senior colleague. *	24(35.6)	23(31.5)	15(20.5)	9 (12.3)	2.1 ± 1.02
I'm a follower rather than a leader. *	26(35.6)	22(32.9)	13(17.8)	10(13.7)	2.41 ± 2.63

A: Always, O: Often, R: Rarely, N: Never,

*Indicates negative statement, SD= Standard Deviation

Majority of the respondents (68.5%) are always frank and honest about their feelings with a mean±SD score 3.57±0.92. Likewise, 68.5% would tell if they were impressed by the actions of their senior colleague with a mean±SD score 3.39±1.06 indicating to be high assertive. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (85.9%) were very careful to avoid hurting other people's feeling with a mean±SD score 1.24±0.68 and 63.0% were always over concerned about patient's welfare with a mean±SD score 1.47±0.70 which indicated the respondents to be less assertive.

Table 5: Respondent's Level of Assertiveness

Level of Assertiveness	Number	Percentage
High Assertiveness (Score Range:84-112)	3	4.2
Moderate Assertiveness (Score range: 55-83)	62	87.3
Low Assertiveness (Score range: 28-54)	6	8.5

Source: (Begley & Glacken, 2004)

Majority of the respondents (78.8%) had moderate level of assertiveness, 16.9% of the respondents had low level of assertiveness and only 4.2% of the respondents had high level of assertiveness.

Association between Respondent's Level of Assertiveness and Socio-demographic Variables

There is no any significant association between the socio-demographic variables i.e. age, religion, ethnicity, area of residence, type of family, marital status, birth order, number of siblings of respondents and overall assertiveness score

DISCUSSION

Our study results demonstrate that almost all the participants (95.9%) had interest in nursing study. The most common reason of the respondents to join nursing was for an opportunity to work internationally (60.3%). The finding is in contrast with the study conducted among 202 nursing students in Nepal where nearly half of the respondents (45.0%) reason to join nursing was voluntarily⁸. This finding may explain that the students are more inclined to work internationally

after their graduation. More than half of the respondents (52.1%) were from third year. In addition, 58.9% of the respondents obtained distinction in previous year.

Concerning assertiveness, current study displayed that majority of the respondents (87.3%) had moderate level of assertiveness which is similar to study conducted in Pokhara i.e., 96.0%⁸. However, a study in Iran found that more than half of the respondents (59.7%) had high level of assertiveness among 173 nursing students⁶. This difference might be due to participation of only female students mostly belonging to age group <20 years. The present study showed that only 15.8% of the respondents had low level of assertiveness.

Current study revealed that the highest mean score (i.e. the highest level of assertiveness) was recorded for “I enjoy starting conversations with acquaintances and strangers (3.75)”, The result is contrast to the study conducted in Ireland in which this statement got a mean score of only 1.67 whereas mean score was gained by another statement “I would feel uncomfortable paying a compliment to junior colleague” where 75.71% stated they would never feel uncomfortable paying a compliment to junior colleague with a mean score of 3.71.⁹ Another statement in current studies scoring higher mean score are “When I'm with my friends, I am frank and honest about my feelings (3.57)”, and “If I was impressed by the actions of senior colleague, I would tell him/ her (3.39).

In this study, the lowest mean score (i.e. the lowest level of assertiveness) was recorded for statement “I'm very careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings” where majority of the respondents (86.3%) responded always in relation to this statement with a mean score of 1.24. This result is similar to study conducted in Greece where most of the respondent (93.42%) responded always in relation to this statement with a mean score of 1.42¹⁰.

The findings of the present study showed that there was no association between level of assertiveness and sociodemographic variables which is similar to the study done in Pokhara, Nepal⁸. But the other study conducted in India among 250 nursing student shows significant association between gender and number of siblings with level of assertiveness¹¹. Also, this finding is contrast to the study conducted in Pakistan among 180 nursing students where there was significant association between level of assertiveness with age and area of residence ($p < 0.004$)¹². This might be partly due to unequal sample size of different groups being compared.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that majority of the respondents have moderate level of assertiveness whereas only few respondents have high level of assertiveness. Respondents were assertive in enjoying to start conversations with strangers, never finding difficult to compliment and praising friends and frank about their feelings. However, they were less assertive in trying to avoid conflict, never disagreeing when a friends' opinion is wrong and more careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings. The study finding shows that there is no significant association between level of assertiveness and selected variables i.e., age, area of residence, marital status, number of siblings, and parents alive.

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