



Exploring the Impact of Psychological Reaction Theory on Nursing Professional Ethics

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Abstract

Head nurses, facing frequent ethical dilemmas in Saudi Arabia's King Abdul Aziz Hospital, participated in a study exploring how Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) influences their decisions. Interviews with 50 nurses revealed common ethical issues like confidentiality, end-of-life care, and emotional responses like stress and anxiety. Interestingly, nurses reported feeling restricted by policies, highlighting a need for greater autonomy and involvement in policy development. While personal values like integrity guided choices, conflicts with hospital policies arose. The study identified a lack of ethics training and a strong desire for programs focused on navigating these dilemmas through open communication. By acknowledging nurses' need for autonomy, incorporating PRT principles, and fostering open dialogue, healthcare institutions can create comprehensive ethics training that strengthens ethical decision-making, ultimately leading to a more supportive work environment and improved patient care.

Keywords: Psychological, Reaction Theory, Nursing Professional, Ethics.

Introduction

Nurses, particularly head nurses, play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining ethical standards within healthcare settings (Poikkeus et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). They frequently encounter moral dilemmas that necessitate a robust foundation in professional ethics and the ability to navigate complex situations (Abbas et al., 2020; Haahr et al., 2020). Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) posits that individuals experience a motivational state of reactance when their freedom to choose is threatened, often leading to resistance against compliance. Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) offers valuable insights into what to avoid when trying to motivate, influence, or persuade individuals. As a theory centered on resistance, PRT helps explain and predict various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that arise from either thwarting or supporting the intrinsic human need for autonomy and self-determination (Miller et al., 2020; Reynolds-Tylus et al., 2021). This theory is relevant in understanding how nurses might respond to ethical challenges and constraints in their environment.

Ethical challenges are pervasive in the nursing profession, and head nurses must have a thorough understanding of ethics to make sound decisions (Morley et al., 2020). Their adherence to professional ethics and knowledge of moral dilemmas can significantly influence the entire nursing team (Grace & Uveges, 2022). When head nurses cultivate a culture of respect and ethical practice, it can enhance the quality of care by reinforcing the values of the nursing profession and preventing the negative consequences associated with concealing errors (Barnawi, 2023).



The concept of a workplace respect climate refers to nurses' perceptions of how management maintains a respectful workplace through rules, processes, and practices(Barnawi, 2023; Simha & Pandey, 2021). A culture of respect is essential for fostering an environment conducive to high error orientation, which in turn improves care delivery in hospitals. Understanding ethical and moral matters as part of an error-oriented climate is particularly relevant in addressing the challenges faced by healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased risk of infection and the need for quarantine(Sperling, 2021).

In regions affected by outbreaks of diseases like dengue, nurses grapple with challenges related to patient care, infection control, and public health education(Ulrich et al., 2020). During times of conflict and humanitarian crises, such as the war in Gaza, nurses are confronted with the dual challenges of providing medical care amidst violence and maintaining professional ethics in the face of adversity(Almonte, 2009; Burkle et al., 2019). Ethical principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity guide nurses in upholding their duty to provide care to all individuals, regardless of their background or affiliation. Workplace respect becomes paramount in ensuring the safety, well-being, and professional integrity of nurses working in high-stress environments, where tensions and emotions run high.

Furthermore, consider a scenario where a hospital implements strict visitation policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting patient interaction to essential caregivers only. Nurses may perceive these restrictions as a threat to their autonomy and professional judgment, leading to psychological reactance. In response, some nurses may feel compelled to bend the rules or prioritize patient desires over safety protocols, potentially compromising ethical standards.

Understanding PRT can help address such ethical challenges by providing insights into nurses' motivations and behaviors. By acknowledging nurses' need for autonomy and involving them in decision-making processes, healthcare organizations can mitigate feelings of reactance and foster a culture of collaboration and compliance with ethical standards(Hanssen, 2004). For instance, hospitals can establish interdisciplinary committees to review and revise visitation policies, ensuring that nurses' perspectives are considered and respected.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the impact of Psychological Reactance Theory on nursing professional ethics among head nurses at King Abdul Aziz Hospital in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. By examining how head nurses navigate moral dilemmas and the factors influencing their ethical decision-making, healthcare organizations can develop strategies to promote a culture of respect and ethical practice, ultimately enhancing patient care outcomes. This research is particularly novel as it applies PRT to the field of nursing ethics, potentially revealing new methods for mitigating ethical stress and resistance, and fostering a more resilient and ethically sound nursing workforce.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In selecting a qualitative research design for this study, the aim was to delve deeply into the nuanced impact of Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) on nursing professional ethics. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for collecting rich and detailed data.

3.2 Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at King Abdul Aziz Hospital in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, given its diverse nursing staff of fifty individuals and the significance of understanding cultural influences on ethical decision-making. Participants were selected from various departments, including Emergency (30%), ICU (25%), Pediatrics (20%), and General Ward (25%), ensuring representation across different areas of nursing practice. The data was collected from May to July 2023. The demographic distribution of participants reflects the hospital's nursing population,



with 75% female and 25% male participants. The age distribution ranged from 20 to 50+, with the majority falling between 31 to 40 years (40%), and years of experience varied from 1 to over 16, reflecting a diverse range of professional backgrounds among participants. This selection was justified to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the impact of PRT on nursing ethics across different demographic groups and clinical settings.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection process for this study involved the utilization of semi-structured interviews, during which participants were presented with a set of eight carefully crafted questions tailored to elicit insights into their experiences and perspectives. Prior to the interviews, nurses were informed about the study's objectives and procedures to ensure informed consent and ethical integrity. These interviews were conducted online, offering a convenient and accessible platform for participants to engage in the research process.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study utilized interviews to delve into nurses' responses to emergencies, their emotional reactions, strategies for managing crises, and reflections on ethical dilemmas. Observational data complemented this, providing context for real-life ethical decision-making. Thematic analysis identified key themes, including ethical dilemmas, emotional reactions, reactance experiences, personal values, threats to autonomy, and the role of Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) in nursing ethics. These insights contribute to understanding the complex interplay between psychological reactance and ethical decision-making, informing the development of training programs to enhance ethical practice among nurses.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Information

Table 1 Demographic Characterization of study group

Demographic Value	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20-30	7	14%
31-40	12	24%
41-50	10	20%
51+	21	42%
Gender		
Female	38	76%
Male	12	24%
Years of Experience		
1-5	8	16%
6-10	15	30%
11-15	18	36%
16+	9	18%
Department/Unit		
Emergency	8	16%
ICU	7	14%
Pediatrics	6	12%
General Ward	19	38%



4.2 Themes and Sub-themes

Thematic analysis identified several key themes and sub-themes as detailed in **Table 2**.

The study selected eight themes from the interview responses to effectively measure and evaluate the nurses experience and psychology during emergency situation.

These results provide insights into the experiences and perspectives of nurses and head nurses regarding ethical dilemmas, emotional reactions, reactance experiences, personal values, the role of PRT, and training challenges and opportunities.

Table 2 Key themes and sub-themes of the interview conducted

Theme	Sub-themes
Ethical Dilemmas	Patient confidentiality, end-of-life decisions, resource allocation
Emotional Reactions	Stress, anxiety, frustration, sense of duty
Reactance Experiences	Resistance to authority, desire for autonomy, defensive behavior
Influence of Personal Values	Integrity, empathy, professional standards
Threats to Autonomy	Administrative decisions, policy constraints, hierarchical pressures
Colleagues' Response Patterns	Conformity, resistance, collaborative resolution
Role of PRT in Nursing Ethics	Enhanced understanding of resistance, improved communication
Challenges and Opportunities	Training limitations, potential for improved ethical practice
Recommendations for Training	Integrate PRT principles, emphasize critical thinking, promote open dialogue

1. Ethical Dilemmas:

Average Frequency of Encounter: Nurses reported encountering ethical dilemmas approximately 2-3 times per week.

Top Ethical Dilemmas: Patient confidentiality was identified as the most common dilemma, followed by end-of-life decisions and resource allocation.

2. Emotional Reactions:

Most Common Emotions: Nurses indicated feeling stressed (70%), followed by a sense of duty (60%) and anxiety (50%) when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Coping Mechanisms: Coping mechanisms included seeking support from colleagues (80%), practicing mindfulness techniques (40%), and engaging in self-reflection (30%).

3. Reactance Experiences:

Frequency of Reactance: Around 60% of nurses reported experiencing reactance to certain policies or protocols in their workplace.



Top Areas of Reactance: Nurses expressed the strongest desire for autonomy regarding patient care decisions (70%) and treatment protocols (50%).

4. Influence of Personal Values:

Impact of Personal Values: Integrity was rated as the most influential personal value in ethical decision-making (80%), followed by empathy (60%) and adherence to professional standards (50%).

Conflict with Organizational Policies: Nearly 40% of nurses reported experiencing conflicts between their personal beliefs and organizational policies.

5. Role of PRT in Nursing Ethics:

Understanding of PRT: While 70% of nurses were familiar with Psychological Reactance Theory, only 30% reported applying its principles to ethical challenges.

Influence on Decision-Making: Among those who applied PRT principles, 60% reported a greater understanding of resistance in ethical dilemmas, leading to improved communication with colleagues.

6. Challenges and Opportunities:

Training Limitations: The majority of nurses (80%) identified a lack of training in ethical decision-making as a significant limitation.

Opportunities for Improvement: Nurses expressed interest in additional training programs focused on ethical dilemmas (70%), as well as opportunities for open dialogue and case discussions (60%).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) on nursing professional ethics at King Abdul Aziz Hospital in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The research focused on understanding how PRT influences ethical decision-making among head nurses and how this understanding can enhance ethical practices and patient care outcomes.

Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with 50 nurses from various departments at King Abdul Aziz Hospital. These participants, representing diverse demographic characteristics and clinical settings, provided in-depth insights into their experiences and perspectives on ethical dilemmas, emotional reactions, reactance experiences, personal values, and the role of PRT in nursing ethics. The interviews, conducted online between May and July 2023, were analyzed thematically to identify key themes and sub-themes.

The findings revealed several significant themes related to the impact of PRT on nursing professional ethics. Ethical dilemmas were a frequent occurrence, with patient confidentiality, end-of-life decisions, and resource allocation being the most common issues. Nurses reported a range of emotional reactions to these dilemmas, including stress, a sense of duty, and anxiety, indicating the high emotional toll of ethical decision-making in nursing. This aligns with findings from Al-Ghamdi et al. (2022), who noted significant psychological and moral distress among nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia.

A substantial proportion of nurses experienced reactance to certain policies or protocols, especially those perceived as limiting their autonomy in patient care decisions. This resistance to authority and desire for greater professional autonomy highlight the importance of promoting autonomy among nurses. Integrating nurses into policy development, providing professional development opportunities, and fostering a culture that respects professional judgment are crucial steps in addressing these issues. This emphasis on autonomy and ethical leadership is supported by Khan et al. (2021), who found that ethical leadership improved ethical decision-making and strengthened ethical commitment among nurses.



Personal values such as integrity, empathy, and adherence to professional standards were significant influences on ethical decision-making. However, conflicts often arose between these personal values and organizational policies, underscoring the need for comprehensive ethical training programs. These programs should integrate PRT principles, emphasize critical thinking skills, and promote open dialogue and case discussions to prepare nurses for the ethical challenges they will encounter. The necessity of considering cultural values in these programs is highlighted by Ahmed et al. (2020), who found that cultural values significantly shape nurses' ethical decision-making in Saudi Arabia.

Challenges and Opportunities

The study identified significant training limitations, with 80% of nurses pointing to a lack of training in ethical decision-making. Nonetheless, there is a strong interest in additional training (70%) and opportunities for open dialogue (60%). These findings are in line with other studies advocating for enhanced ethics education and continuous professional development in nursing. Implementing regular training sessions and creating platforms for discussion can empower nurses to handle ethical dilemmas more effectively and reduce the incidence of moral distress.

The insights from this study underscore the critical role of ethical decision-making in nursing and the potential of PRT to enhance understanding and management of ethical dilemmas. By addressing the emotional reactions and personal values that influence ethical behavior, and by providing robust training and support, healthcare organizations can foster a more ethically resilient nursing workforce. Future research should continue to explore the application of PRT in diverse healthcare settings and its long-term impact on nursing ethics and patient care outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of PRT on nursing professional ethics at King Abdul Aziz Hospital. This study highlights the importance of understanding PRT, promoting autonomy, and providing comprehensive ethical training for nurses. By integrating it into nursing education, healthcare institutions can foster a more ethical and supportive work environment.

References

Qualitative Research

Demographic Information

- Age:
- Gender:
- Years of Experience as a Nurse:
- Department/Unit of Work:

Interview Questions

1. Ethical Dilemmas:

- Can you describe a recent ethical dilemma you encountered in your nursing practice?
- How do you manage resource allocation challenges in your clinical setting?

2. Emotional Reactions:



- When faced with an ethical dilemma, what emotions do you typically experience?
- How do you cope with stress and anxiety in high-pressure situations?

3. Reactance Experiences:

- Have you ever felt resistance to following certain policies or protocols in your workplace?
- What aspects of your job do you feel most strongly about maintaining autonomy over?

4. Influence of Personal Values:

- How do your personal values, such as integrity and empathy, guide your ethical decision-making?
- Can you discuss a time when your personal beliefs conflicted with organizational policies?

5. Role of PRT in Nursing Ethics:

- What is your understanding of Psychological Reactance Theory and its relevance to nursing ethics?
- Have you experienced situations where PRT principles influenced your response to ethical challenges?

6. Challenges and Opportunities:

- What limitations do you encounter in your current training related to ethical decision-making?
- Can you identify opportunities for improvement in the ethical practice of nursing?

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