

The effect of assertiveness-based intervention program on self-esteem and interpersonal communication skills in nursing students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Assertiveness is an important skill for today's professional nurse which increases self-confidence, and enhances interpersonal communications. This study was aimed to examine the effect of assertiveness-based program on self-esteem and interpersonal communication in nursing students. **Materials and methods:** This was a semi-experimental study with control group conducted on 60 students using convenience sampling and were randomly allocated into two groups. Data collection tool was self-esteem and interpersonal communication scales in a such way that were completed before and after intervention. The training program was hold in six sessions of 1.5 hours (one session per week). No training program was considered for the control group. Paired t-test was used to compare the mean of intra-group scores for the pre-test and post-test scores and independent t-test were used to compare the mean scores of the experiment and control groups. **Results:** The results showed that after the assertiveness-based intervention program, the mean score of self-esteem in the experiment group (31.06 ± 3.13) was significantly higher compared to the control group (28.13 ± 2.52) ($P < 0.001$). Additionally, the mean score of interpersonal communication in the intervention group was significantly higher compared to the control group ($P < 0.001$). The results of paired t-test showed a significant difference in total self-esteem before and after intervention ($P = 0.009$). According to independent t-test, the mean and standard deviation of the difference between before and after the interpersonal communication in the intervention group (13.7 ± 6.58) and in the control group (2.83 ± 7.11) was statistically significant ($P < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** According to the results, the assertiveness-based training increases self-esteem and interpersonal communication and can be used to increase self-esteem and communication skills of nursing students.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Interpersonal communication, Life skills, Nursing students, self-esteem

Introduction

The core of nursing is to establish interaction between nurse and patient ^[1], so that this relationship in nursing is professional, direct and long-term compared to other health care workers ^[2]. It is also based on mutual trust and respect and is as the result of

the collaboration between nurse and patient to enhance the highest level of health among patients ^[3]. Nowadays, effective communication skills are seen as a critical component of quality and safety in health care and is considered as a professional competence index in nursing ^[4]. Communication skills acquired in the educational environment are not always transmitted to the clinical environment, in which make the nurses able to understand the needs of their patient ^[5]. Communication technology is one of the key skills in nursing that can be attained by knowledge and practice ^[6]. Moreover, problems in communication will end in big problems increasing the responsibility and put professional credibility at risk ^[7]. Assertiveness may develop communication skills and enhances self-confidence and decision-making skills and is a valuable component to successful career performance, it helps to solve many conflicts of nursing position ^[8, 9]. Some problems among

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young adults in education field are anxiety, low assertiveness, depression, rage and aggression ^[6]. Some students are not assertive enough to ask for help from others making them unable to communicate with their professors, counselors and classmates ^[7]. Assertiveness is considered to be a significant behavior today for professional nursing in establishing a successful relationship with clients, families and colleagues ^[10]. Also, self-esteem is critical for nurses to improve the potential for success as an indispensable elements in coping with stress ^[9]. During the training period, nursing students with a strong self-esteem can

establish effective therapeutic relationships with patients and manage the challenges in communicating with patients ^[6]. It should be noted that one of the purposes of nursing education is to increase the self-esteem of nursing students ^[6]. The results of the studies in Iran have indicated that nursing students and nurses have a moderate or low self-esteem that may assert negative effects on their professional performance ^[4, 11]. There are few studies with an effect on students' self-esteem, and the aim of this study was to examine the effect of assertive-based intervention program on self-esteem and interpersonal relationships in nursing students at Khoy University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods

Study design

This was a semi-experimental study with control group conducted on students of last semester in Khoy University of Medical Sciences.

Study procedure

The researcher introduced herself to 60 nursing students after obtaining the necessary permissions from the relevant unit, ethics committee of the university, receiving trial code of the Iran Registry of Clinical (N120181029041498IRCT) and referring in Khoy University of Medical Sciences and expressing the goals of the study to the authorities. Thus, written informed consent was obtained from the students to participate in the study.

Study sampling

Considering the inclusion criteria of the study, 60 students entered into the study by simple random sampling method and randomly assigned to the experiment (30 subjects) and control (30 subjects) groups.

Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were:

1. Studying in the 5th and 7th terms
2. Lack of participation in last assertiveness training classes
3. Lack of psychological illness (non-use of psychiatric drugs)

Exclusion criteria

1. Lack of willingness to continue the study
2. Absence from the training sessions for more than one session

Before intervention, pre-test was given to the both groups. After that, an assertiveness-based intervention program was conducted. The sessions were for six weeks, weekly, and each session for 1.5 hours and researcher used lectures along questions and answers. The skill of assertiveness and self-expression were as the main content of the program prepared according to the texts contained in the articles and life skills training books. No training program was considered for the control group. Three weeks after the end of the sixth session, the post-test was taken from the experiment and control groups

Data collection tools

In this study, data collection tools were demographic characteristics questionnaire, Cooper Smith self-esteem scale, and interpersonal communication scale.

A. Demographic questionnaire included variables such as age, gender, economic status, marital status, being indigenous or not, grade point average and university years.

B. Copper Smith self-esteem scale

This scale has 58 items, eight of which assess lie. Overall, 50 items are divided into 4 subscales of general self-esteem, social self-esteem, family self-esteem and academic self-esteem. The content validity of the Cooper Smith self-esteem questionnaire in and outside the country has been confirmed by various researchers ^[11, 12]. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was reported in the Mousavi's study as 0.74, showing a good reliability of it ^[13].

C. Interpersonal-communication skills scale

This questionnaire has 19 items, with scores ranging from 19 to 95 with a 5-point Likert scale (very low to very good, grades 1 to 5). Higher score shows interpersonal skills and lower score shows less interpersonal communication skills. Nonetheless, for more precise results, the following categorization will be used to measure the interpersonal skills of the respondent: (score < 45: severe communication problems), (score 46-65: communication problem) (score 66-95: capable person) ^[14]. Validity of this scale was confirmed in Iran and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported 0.74 in the Mosavi study, which indicates a good reliability of the scale ^[13].

Results

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check normality of scores of self-esteem dimensions and interpersonal communication in the experiment and control group which was normal. The mean age of the experiment group was 21.66 ± 0.99 years and in the control group was 22.10 ± 0.99 years, respectively. Regarding gender, in the experiment group, 40% were males and 60% were female as well as in the control group, 50% were males and 50% were females. In the

experiment group, 86.7% were single and 13.3% were married as well as in the control group, 6.7% were married and 93.3% were single.

The results showed that before the intervention, the difference of the mean score of self-esteem was not significant in the two intervention groups (28.60 ± 2.97) and control groups (27.23 ± 2.71) ($P=0.068$). Independent t-test showed that the hypothesis of equality of self-esteem scores mean scores between two groups was not significant ($P<0.05$) (Table 1).

The results indicated that after intervention, the mean of total self-esteem score was significant in the intervention (31.06 ± 3.13) and control groups (28.13 ± 2.52) ($P<0.001$). The results of independent t-test showed that the hypothesis of equality of mean scores for general self-esteem and academic self-esteem between two groups was significant ($t=2.32$, $P=0.023$) and ($t=2.57$, $P=0.013$), respectively. After the intervention, there were no significant differences between the two groups in degree of social self-esteem and family self-esteem ($P>0.05$). Mean score of interpersonal communication in the intervention (74.46 ± 8.43) and control groups (61.63 ± 9.68) after the intervention was significant ($P<0.001$) (Table 2).

Table 1. Comparison of mean score of self-esteem and interpersonal relationships before intervention between two groups

Subscale		Mean	SD	Statistic	P value
General self-esteem	Intervention	15.03	1.97	$t=1.28$	0.20
	Control	14.36	2.04	$Df=58$	
Social self-esteem	Intervention	4.50	1.47	$t=0.09$	0.92
	Control	4.46	1.10	$Df=58$	
Family self-esteem	Intervention	4.66	0.95	$t=0.54$	0.58
	Control	4.53	0.93	$Df=58$	
Academic self-esteem	Intervention	4.40	1.03	$t=1.87$	0.066
	Control	3.86	1.16	$Df=58$	
Self-esteem (total)	Intervention	28.60	2.97	$t=1.85$	0.068
	Control	27.23	2.71	$Df=58$	
Interpersonal communication	Intervention	60.76	9.63	$t=0.79$	0.43
	Control	58.80	9.62	$Df=58$	

Table 2. Comparison of mean scores of self-esteem aspects and interpersonal communication after intervention between two groups

Subscale		Mean	SD	Statistic	P value
General self-esteem	Intervention	16.06	2.25	$t=2.32$	0.023
	Control	14.76	2.062	$Df=58$	
Social self-esteem	Intervention	5.36	1.21	$t=1.81$	0.075
	Control	4.83	1.05	$Df=58$	
Family self-esteem	Intervention	5.03	0.61	$t=1.70$	0.094
	Control	4.70	0.87	$Df=58$	
Academic self-esteem	Intervention	4.60	1.10	$t=2.57$	0.013
	Control	3.83	1.20	$Df=58$	
Self-esteem	Intervention	31.06	3.13	$t=3.98$	<0.001

(total)	Control	28.13	2.52	$Df=58$	
Interpersonal communication	Intervention	74.46	8.43	$t=5.47$	<0.001
	Control	61.63	9.68	$Df=58$	

Discussion

Nowadays, assertiveness for professional nursing is considered as a significant behavior to communicate successfully with clients, families and colleagues. Furthermore, assertiveness is the pivot of nursing activities enabling the nurses to be more independent and more active as decision-makers [14].

The present study tried to homogenize the nursing students in the intervention and control groups to reduce the confounding variables in terms of quantitative and qualitative demographic characteristics such as age, gender, gender, lifestyle, marital status, and birth rank.

Consistent with the first objective of the study, "Determining and comparing self-esteem scores and interpersonal relationships among nursing students of Khoy University of Medical Sciences in 2017 before intervention in the experiment and control groups", the results showed that the mean score of self-esteem and interpersonal communication in the intervention and control groups were not significant before the intervention. In other words, before the intervention, there was no significant difference between the two groups regarding self-esteem scores. These results were consistent with the results of similar studies among nursing students and other groups in different countries. The results of the studies of Nishina, Tanigaki (2013) and Motahari et al. (2015) were consistent with the results of the present study. They also showed that prior to assertiveness-training intervention, the two groups had no differences in the scores of self-esteem, but after intervention these scores increased and were statistically significant in the intervention group [15, 16]. In our study, the assertiveness-based intervention program could increase the level of self-esteem in general self-esteem and academic self-esteem as well as interpersonal communication in the experiment group.

To reach the second objective of the study, "Determining and comparing self-esteem scores and interpersonal relationships among nursing students of Khoy University of Medical Sciences in 2017 after intervention in the intervention and control groups", the results showed that the total mean scores of self-esteem and interpersonal communication in the intervention and control groups after intervention was significant. However, in the subscales of self-esteem, only the mean scores of general self-esteem and academic self-esteem were significant in the experiment group. This means that the intervention program based on assertiveness-training increases self-esteem in terms of general self-esteem and academic self-esteem as well as interpersonal communication in the intervention group. In this regard, which general and academic self-esteem in the intervention group were significant, the study of Kiya et al. (2016) on the effect of training self-expression on students' self-esteem and the study of Mehrabizadeh et al. (2009) on the

effect of assertiveness-based training on social skills, social anxiety and academic performance in female students were consistent with our study [17, 18]. In the study of Lin et al. (2004) entitled "the effect of training on assertiveness skills on determinism, self-esteem and satisfaction with interpersonal communication between nursing and medical students", no significant effect was found in increasing the satisfaction of interpersonal communication. The reason for the difference in the result of the study of Lin et al. with our study can be the difference in the method of training.

Conclusion

Assertiveness-based training was effective for increasing self-esteem and interpersonal communication, so it can be used to increase the assertiveness of nursing students during the course of university. It is suggested that assertiveness-based programs be studied among students among other academic majors.

Limitations of the study

Some students did not cooperate in answering and returning the questionnaire which was controlled by considering the number of samples. Student's individual differences which were controlled by random allocation of the experiment and control groups. Psychosocial-emotional conditions of students that can be effective in answering the questionnaire. Students' use of books and internet can affect the outcome of the study which was beyond the control of the researcher.

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