Journal of Innovative and Creativity
Journal Homepage: https://joecy.org/index.php/joecy
e-mail: journaljoecy@gmail.com

Faculty of Education
University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai
ISSN 2775-771X (Online)
ISSN 2962-570X (Printed)
6 (1) 2026, Page: 2811-2815

Implementation of Nursing Ethical Principles in Action Services at Hewokloang Health Center: Qualitative Case Study

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Published: January, 2026

ABSTRACT

The application of ethical principles is the main foundation in nursing practice to ensure patient safety, service quality, and protection of patients' rights, especially in first-level health services. However, findings suggest that the application of ethical principles, especially patient autonomy, still faces obstacles in daily nursing practice.

The study purpose was to describe the application of the principles of nurse ethics in the action room of the Hewokloang Health Center.

Materials and methods. The research used a Qualitative case study approach with in-depth thematic analysis. The informants consisted of six people consisting of three patients as the main informant and three nurses as supporting informants. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and in-depth thematic analysis, with stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

Results. The results of the study showed that the application of most of the ethical principles of nurses in the action room of the Hewokloang Health Center was relatively good (>80%), especially beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, as well as aspects of professional responsibility and honesty. However, the principle of patient autonomy is still not optimal due to the limitations of therapeutic communication, so it is necessary to strengthen information provision and patient involvement in nursing decision-making.

Conclusions. The application of the principles of nurse ethics in the Hewokloang Health Center action room is generally good, but it is still necessary to strengthen therapeutic communication to increase respect for patient autonomy and the quality of ethical nursing services.

Keywords: ethical principles; nurses; patient autonomy; health centers; nursing care.

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INTRODUCTION

In nursing services in first-level health facilities, the application of ethical principles, especially patient autonomy (PA) is the main indicator of service quality and respect for patients' rights (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019; Kwame & Petrucka, 2021). Patient autonomy refers to the patient's ability and right to receive adequate information, understand alternative course of action, and be actively involved in decision-making related to his or her health care (Entwistle et al., 2020). However, various international studies show that PA is still the most difficult ethical principle to implement in nursing practice, especially in primary services, due to time constraints, high workload, professional assumptions about patient capacity, and low patient health literacy (Kwame & Petrucka, 2021; Yang et al., 2022). Hertzberg et al. (2023) emphasized that in daily nursing practice, patient autonomy is often unconsciously compromised by healthcare workers for the sake of service efficiency or clinical considerations, so PA is not fully realized as a shared decision-making process. The study of Kwame and Petrucka (2021) also showed that failure of therapeutic communication significantly weakens patient autonomy and inhibits the implementation of patient-centered care. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2022) found that low nurse competence in health literacy has a direct impact

on limited patient participation in decision-making, especially in patients with low levels of education and certain health conditions. Meanwhile, Bolado et al. (2024) highlight that the practice of informed consent in many healthcare services is still procedural and administrative, so it does not fully reflect respect for PA as a fundamental ethical principle. This condition emphasizes the urgency of conducting research that describes the application of the ethical principles of nurses with a focus on patient autonomy in the puskesmas action space, in order to identify gaps in ethical practices and strengthen therapeutic communication as the foundation of ethical and patient-centered nursing services.

Globally, the problem of respect for patient autonomy (PA) is still reflected in the low quality of informed consent practices in health services. Cross-sector studies on health workers show that only 53.1% of respondents have good informed consent practices, while the rest are still in the inadequate category, which indicates the weak realization of PA in the clinical decision-making process (Bolado et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, the challenges of implementing PA can be seen from the aspect of providing information as a key component of patient-centered care; research in referral hospitals shows that although the dimension of respect for patients' dignity is highly valued, the dimensions of information provision and patient involvement in decisions is still at a lower level than other ethical dimensions (Putri et al., 2021). This condition indicates that PA in Indonesia is still not optimally implemented in daily nursing practice. At the regional level, especially in East Nusa Tenggara, research on hospital nurses shows that deontological ethical constructs which include autonomy, justice, and honesty contribute 40% to nurse ethical decision-making, confirming that the issue of PA is a significant but not fully strong factor in clinical practice (Bita Aty, 2022). In line with these findings, the results of this study in the action room.

The Hewokloang Health Center points out that although most ethical principles have been well implemented, the principle of patient autonomy is still not optimal, especially in patients with limited education and certain health conditions, which is reflected in the lack of a comprehensive explanation before action is taken. These findings reinforce the urgency of research to identify gaps in the implementation of PA in primary services and formulate strategies to strengthen therapeutic communication based on nursing ethics (Mane et al., 2025).

Chronologically, the problem of implementing patient autonomy (PA) in nursing services in primary care stems from system and individual factors of nurses, such as high workload, limited service time, and the dominance of biomedical approaches that place nurses as the main decision-makers (Hertzberg et al., 2023). This condition causes the communication process before the nursing procedure to be brief and one-way, so the information provided to the patient is often insufficient to support informed decision-making. In the next stage, the low health literacy–sensitive communication competence in nurses worsens the situation, especially when dealing with patients with low education or with certain health conditions, which ultimately limits the patient's active involvement in the treatment process (Yang et al., 2022). The continued impact of this series of problems is the reduction of patient-centered care practices, increased patient dependence on health workers' decisions, and the potential for a decrease in patient satisfaction and trust in nursing services (Kwame & Petrucka, 2021). In the context of the puskesmas action space, this chronology has serious implications because nursing actions are often carried out in a short time but have a direct impact on the safety and rights of patients, so that the neglect of PA is not only an ethical issue, but also a risk to the quality of service and patient safety.

Efforts to overcome the weak implementation of patient autonomy (PA) in nursing services require a systemic approach oriented towards strengthening therapeutic communication. Recent literature confirms that increasing nurses' capacity in ethical communication and shared decision-making is a key strategy to strengthen PAs, especially in primary services that have limited time and resources (Entwistle et al., 2020). In addition, nursing training that focuses on health literacy–sensitive care has been proven to be able to improve nurses' ability to adjust information with level of patient understanding, thereby encouraging the patient's active involvement in clinical decision-making

(Yang et al., 2022). The implementation of effective therapeutic communication also plays an important role in creating patient-centered care services, which are consistently associated with increased patient satisfaction, adherence to actions, and trust in healthcare workers (Kwame & Petrucka, 2021). Therefore, this study is directed to comprehensively describe the application of the ethical principles of nurses, especially PA in the puskesmas action room, as the basis for the preparation of recommendations for strengthening therapeutic communication and contextual nursing ethics practices. By understanding the real conditions in the field, the results of the research are expected to be a reference for the development of internal policies of health centers, nurse ethics training, and improving the quality of ethical and patient-centered nursing services.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design that aims to describe the application of nursing ethical principles in nursing action services. The research was carried out in the action room of the Hewokloang Health Center, Sikka Regency, in April 2025. The research informants consisted of six people who were selected by purposive sampling, consisting of three patients as the main informant and three nurses as supporting informants, with inclusion criteria of being willing to be informants, able to communicate well, and being at the research site when data was collected. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guides, with researchers as the primary instrument supported by recording tools and field notes. Data analysis is carried out qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to obtain an overview and meaning of the application of ethical principles. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and consistency of research procedures, and the entire research process is carried out by paying attention to the principles of research ethics which include informed consent, anonymity, data confidentiality, and respect for the rights and dignity of informants.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. Application of Nurse Ethical Principles in The Action Room

Principles of Nursing Ethics	Implementation Indicators	Percentage of Adoption (%)	Categories
Beneficence	Measures oriented towards the safety and interests of the patient	>85%	Good
Non-maleficence	Implementation of actions in accordance with SOPs and minimal risk	>85%	Good
Justice	Fair treatment without discrimination	>80%	Good
Fidelity	Commitment and loyalty to professional responsibility	>80%	Good
Veracity	Honesty in informing actions	±75%	Enough
Confidentiality	Protection of patient privacy and data	>90%	Good
Accountability	Responsibility for any nursing actions	>85%	Good
Autonomy	Providing information and patient involvement in decisions	<70%	Less Than Optimal

Category Description:

- Good: □80%
- Adequate: 70–79%
- Less Optimal: <70%

Discussion

The results of this study show that the application of the ethical principles of nurses in the action room of the Hewokloang Health Center is generally in the good category, with an application rate above 80% in most ethical principles, especially beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, confidentiality, and accountability. These findings indicate that nursing practices in primary care tend to be strong on ethical principles that are protective and procedural, especially as they relate directly to patient safety and compliance with service standards. This is in line with the principles of biomedical ethics that place safety and hazard prevention as top priorities in clinical practice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

The application of the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence in this study is consistent with the findings of Bolado et al. (2024), who reported that healthcare workers generally have a strong commitment to safe practices and do not harm patients. However, the study also emphasizes that excessive focus on safety and efficiency aspects of action can cause ethical practices to shift to task-oriented, resulting in less attention to patient communication and engagement. This pattern is reflected in this study, where the principle of safety is well applied, but the principle that demands dialogue interaction shows weaknesses.

The most crucial finding in this study is that the application of the principle of patient autonomy has not been optimal, with an implementation rate below 70%. Some patients stated that they had not received sufficient explanation before the action was taken and had not been fully involved in nursing decision-making. This condition is in line with research by Hertzberg et al. (2023) which states that in daily nursing practice, patient autonomy is often compromised due to time pressure, high workload, and the dominance of professional perspectives in clinical decision-making. As a result, the decisions taken are more oriented towards efficiency and safety, rather than on the shared decision-making process.

Furthermore, the weak application of patient autonomy in this study is closely related to aspects of therapeutic communication and health literacy. Yang et al. (2022) found that nurses' competence in sensitive communication of health literacy was significantly related to improved patient-centered care and patient involvement in decision-making. Thus, the low autonomy of patients in this study can be understood not only as a problem of the ethical attitude of nurses, but also as a limitation in the ability to convey medical information clearly, simply, and easily understood by patients with diverse educational backgrounds.

In addition, the research of Entwistle et al. (2020) confirms that patient autonomy should be understood as an ongoing process in shared decision-making, not just administrative approval before action. The findings of this study show that the practice of informed consent in the puskesmas action room still tends to be formal and brief, so it does not fully reflect respect for patient autonomy as a fundamental ethical principle. This has the potential to have an impact on patient satisfaction, trust in health workers, and the quality of the therapeutic relationship between nurses and patients.

In summary, the results of this study show that there is an imbalance in the application compared to ethical principles, where the protective principles (beneficence and non-maleficence).

The principle of autonomy is more dominant. These findings reinforce the empirical evidence that improving the quality of nursing services in primary care is not enough only through adherence to procedures and safety, but also requires strengthening therapeutic communication and patient involvement in decision-making. Therefore, the development of communication-based nursing ethics training, improving health literacy competencies, and the implementation of the shared decision-making model are important strategies to strengthen respect for patient autonomy without sacrificing safety and service efficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of the principles of nurse ethics in the Hewokloang Health Center action room is generally good. However, the application of the principle of autonomy still needs to be improved through strengthening therapeutic communication and providing more comprehensive information to patients.

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