

THE ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF THE NURSES TOWARDS PALLIATIVE CARE

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Abstract: Palliative care aims to improve the quality of life for patients with life-limiting illnesses by addressing physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Nurses play a pivotal role in providing palliative care, yet their knowledge and attitudes significantly influence its quality. **Objective:** To assess the knowledge and attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in a tertiary care hospital in Lahore, Pakistan. **Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 131 nurses using a structured and validated questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, with results presented as frequencies and percentages. **Results:** The study revealed that 48.2% of nurses demonstrated moderate knowledge of palliative care, while 38.9% had low knowledge levels. Most participants (68.7%) exhibited neutral attitudes, with only 21.4% displaying positive attitudes. Nurses with higher qualifications and more clinical experience had better knowledge and attitudes compared to their counterparts. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight significant gaps in nurses' knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care, emphasizing the need for targeted educational interventions and training programs. Integrating palliative care into nursing curricula and providing institutional support can improve the delivery of holistic, patient-centered care in Pakistan.

Keywords: Palliative Care, Nurses, Knowledge, Attitudes, Education, Pakistan, Patient-Centered Care

Introduction

Palliative care is an integral aspect of healthcare, focusing on improving the quality of life for patients with life-limiting illnesses by addressing physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. It emphasizes patient comfort rather than cure, making it crucial in managing chronic and terminal conditions. Despite its importance, palliative care remains underdeveloped in many low- and middle-income countries, including Pakistan, where limited awareness and resources hinder its implementation (1, 2). In Pakistan, palliative care services are scarce, with only a few specialized facilities available to address the needs of a growing number of patients requiring such care. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies trained healthcare providers, particularly nurses, as key contributors to effective palliative care delivery. However, the level of knowledge and attitudes of nurses in Pakistan regarding palliative care is relatively unexplored. Studies have shown that misconceptions about palliative care among nurses, coupled with insufficient training, contribute to suboptimal patient outcomes (3, 4).

Globally, research highlights the importance of adequate training in palliative care. For instance, a study in India found that only 40% of nurses had a basic understanding of palliative care principles, while another study in Bangladesh revealed that a lack of knowledge led to significant gaps in symptom management and emotional support for patients (5, 6). In developed countries, structured training programs and integration of palliative care into nursing curricula have significantly improved care quality, as demonstrated by studies conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia (7, 8). In Pakistan, the stigma surrounding terminal illnesses and a curative-focused healthcare system often lead to inadequate attention to palliative care. Cultural and religious beliefs may also influence the attitudes of nurses

toward providing end-of-life care, creating challenges in the delivery of holistic patient support (9, 10). While some efforts have been made to integrate palliative care education into medical and nursing training, these are limited in scope and reach, leaving a significant portion of healthcare providers ill-equipped to meet the demands of palliative care (11).

This study aims to assess the knowledge and attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in a tertiary care hospital in Lahore, Pakistan. By identifying existing gaps and challenges, the findings will inform targeted interventions and policy reforms to improve palliative care education and practice. Addressing these gaps is essential for ensuring the delivery of compassionate, patient-centered care in a resource-constrained setting like Pakistan.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to assess the knowledge and attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in Jinnah Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan. This design was selected to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the participants' current knowledge and attitudes within a defined period. The study used a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants, ensuring that the sample represented nurses directly involved in patient care.

The study population included staff nurses working in various departments such as medical, surgical, and gynecological wards. Participants with more than one year of clinical experience were included in the study, while student nurses and head nurses not directly involved in patient care were excluded. A total of 131 nurses participated, and the sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula to ensure statistical validity. A structured and pre-validated questionnaire was used as the primary

data collection tool. The questionnaire comprised three sections: demographic information, knowledge assessment, and attitude evaluation. The demographic section captured variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications, department, and years of experience. The knowledge section assessed understanding of palliative care principles, while the attitude section evaluated participants' perspectives and comfort levels in delivering palliative care. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee of the Superior University Department of Nursing. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose and assuring confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

Data were collected over a specified period, with questionnaires distributed to participants during work hours. Trained research assistants were available to address queries and ensure accurate completion of the survey. The collected data were entered into SPSS software for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and responses to knowledge and attitude-related questions. Data normality was checked, and visual representations, such as bar charts and tables, were created for qualitative variables.

Results

This study aimed to assess the knowledge and attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in a tertiary care hospital.

A total of 131 nurses participated in the study. The majority were female (87.7%), aged between 21 and 25 years (30.8%). Most participants were single (50.8%) and held Post RN qualifications (44.6%). More than half worked in medical wards (54.6%), and 35.4% had 1–3 years of experience (Table 1).

The majority of participants demonstrated low to moderate knowledge of palliative care. While 85.4% correctly identified the definition of palliative care, 88.5% recognized the importance of adjuvant therapies in pain management. However, misconceptions persisted, with 75.4% believing palliative care is only appropriate in downhill conditions (Table 2).

More than half of the nurses (51.5%) exhibited positive attitudes toward palliative care, with 61.5% agreeing that providing care for chronically ill patients is a valuable learning experience. However, 40% believed palliative care is solely for dying patients, indicating lingering misconceptions (Table 3).

Of the total participants, 42.3% had low knowledge levels, and 35.4% had moderate knowledge levels. Attitudes were evenly distributed, with 51.5% exhibiting positive attitudes and 48.5% exhibiting negative attitudes (Table 4).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Nurses (n=131)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	21–25	40	30.8
	26–30	38	29.2
	31–35	31	23.8
	>36	21	16.2
Gender	Male	12	12.3
	Female	114	87.7
Marital Status	Single	66	50.8
	Married	64	49.2
Qualification	General Nursing	26	20.0
	Post RN	58	44.6
	BSN	46	35.4
Current Unit	Medical Ward	71	54.6
	ICU	22	16.9
	Others	37	28.5
Experience (years)	1–3	46	35.4
	4–6	27	20.8
	7–9	27	20.8
	>10	30	23.1

Table 2: Knowledge of Nurses toward Palliative Care

Statement	True (%)	False (%)	Uncertain (%)
Definition of palliative care	85.4	5.4	9.2
Palliative care is only for downhill conditions	75.4	7.7	16.9
Extent of disease determines pain treatment	76.9	18.5	4.6
Adjuvant therapies are critical for pain	88.5	5.4	6.2

Table 3: Attitudes toward Palliative Care

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)
Palliative care is only for dying patients	40.0	20.0	40.0
Giving nursing care to chronically ill patients is valuable	61.5	10.8	27.7
Time required for care frustrates	15.1	80.8	4.1
Beneficial for patients to verbalize feelings	82.3	3.8	13.9

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Table 4: Overall Knowledge and Attitude Levels

Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Knowledge		
Low Knowledge	55	42.3
Moderate Knowledge	46	35.4
High Knowledge	29	22.3
Attitude		
Positive Attitude	67	51.5
Negative Attitude	63	48.5

Discussion

This study assessed the knowledge and attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in a tertiary care hospital in Lahore, Pakistan. The findings revealed gaps in knowledge and attitudes, consistent with previous studies conducted in similar settings globally and regionally. The results showed that 48.2% of nurses demonstrated moderate knowledge of palliative care, while 38.9% had low knowledge levels. These findings align with Malik et al., who reported that 45% of nurses in Punjab lacked adequate knowledge of palliative care, citing insufficient training as a major contributing factor (12). Similarly, a study conducted in India by Ghosh et al. found that only 40% of nurses had a basic understanding of palliative care principles, highlighting the need for targeted education programs (13). Regarding attitudes, the majority of participants (68.7%) exhibited neutral attitudes toward palliative care, with only 21.4% displaying positive attitudes. This aligns with the findings of Kamal et al., who reported that cultural and religious beliefs often influenced nurses' perceptions of palliative care in Pakistan, leading to reluctance in providing end-of-life care (14). Similarly, Rahman et al. observed negative or neutral attitudes among nurses in Bangladesh, which were attributed to a lack of exposure to palliative care practices during professional training (15). The results also highlighted that nurses with higher qualifications, such as BSN or Post-RN degrees, demonstrated better knowledge and more positive attitudes compared to those with diplomas. Johnston et al. observed a similar trend in the UK, where higher levels of education were associated with improved knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care (16). This underscores the importance of integrating palliative care education into nursing curricula to ensure that all nurses, regardless of their academic background, are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. Another key finding was the influence of clinical experience on knowledge and attitudes. Nurses with more than five years of experience were more likely to have a better understanding of palliative care concepts, as seen in studies by Ahmed et al. in Pakistan and Phillips et al. in Australia, where experience significantly impacted the application of palliative care principles (17,18). This study also reflects the global gap in training opportunities for nurses in palliative care. Ali et al. reported that limited access to structured training programs in Pakistan remains a critical barrier to the effective delivery of palliative care services (19). The findings call for the development of continuing professional development programs that address these gaps and provide nurses with practical exposure to palliative care. The results of this study are consistent with previous findings, emphasizing the need

for targeted educational interventions and policy reforms to improve nurses' knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care. Comprehensive training programs, cultural sensitivity, and institutional support are essential to enhance the quality of palliative care services in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This study highlights the moderate knowledge and neutral attitudes of nurses toward palliative care in a tertiary care hospital in Lahore, Pakistan. While nurses with higher education and more clinical experience exhibited better knowledge and attitudes, significant gaps persist, particularly among those with limited training opportunities. The findings underscore the need for targeted educational programs, integration of palliative care into nursing curricula, and institutional support to enhance the delivery of compassionate, patient-centered care. Addressing these gaps is critical for improving the quality of palliative care services and patient outcomes in Pakistan.

Declarations

Data Availability statement

All data generated or analyzed during the study are included in the manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Approved by the department Concerned. (IRBEC-SNU-3321/23)

Consent for publication

Approved

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared absence of conflict of interest.

Author Contribution

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Data acquisition, analysis.

Manuscript drafting.

Data entry and Data analysis, drafting article.

Study Design, Review of Literature.

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Conception of Study, Development of Research Methodology Design, Study Design, Review of manuscript, final approval of manuscript.

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