# *Nursing Students' Perception of Instructor Caring Behaviors in Zanjan Province in 2021*

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## Abstract

*Background:* Instructors' caring behaviors are regarded as one of the most impressive factors in the process of clinical training which is significant to promote the students' self-efficacy and self-confidence. Thus, it is of great importance to identify and promote the instructors' caring behaviors.

*Objectives:* This study was performed aiming to determine the students' perception of instructors' caring behaviors in Zanjan province.

*Methods:* This is a descriptive cross-sectional study which was conducted in 2021 on 235 nursing students of bachelor degree from the 4th semesters onwards in Zanjan province who were included in the study by stratified random sampling. To collect data, the questionnaires of demographic information and "Nursing Students Perception of Instructor Caring" were used. Statistical analysis was performed by independent t-test, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS software version 25.

*Results***:** The mean±Sd of instructors' caring behaviors was 126.37±14.70. The highest and lowest mean scores were related to the dimensions of respectful sharing (5.08) and control versus flexibility (3.26) respectively. There was a statistically significant relationship between creating a supportive learning climate and students' marital status (t=-1/9, p=0.05) and also between the appreciation of life's meaning and control versus flexibility with students' semesters (p<0.05).

*Conclusion:* From the perspective of nursing students, the instructor's caring behavior was in average level. Therefore, it is recommended to take action in order to improve the instructors' caring behavior through training workshops.

*Keywords: caring behavior, nursing instructors, nursing students*

## Introduction

Caring is considered as a core concept in nursing [1]. According to Watson, the goal of nursing lies on helping the people to attain higher degree of harmony in mind, body and spirit. This goal is achieved through care measures [2]. In nursing training, care is an interpersonal process that involves qualification, interpersonal sensitivity, intimate relationships, empathy and relationship with people [3]. Watson considers caring relationship as transpersonal, holistic, and a specific type of human care. Transpersonal means to appreciate deeply another person's points of view beyond objective evaluation. The purpose of transpersonal caring relationships is to attain dignity, humanity and integrity of the individual [4]. Watson believes that caring relationship depends on several elements, including: moral commitment to protect and strengthen human dignity, respect for the individual, and communication as a human being, genuine presence, keeping balance and conscious caring

intent. The concept of nursing students' perceptions of instructor caring is described as "nursing students' awareness of a shared and mutual connection between the self and the instructor that enables them to seek meaning, wholeness and growth as professional care nurses". Wade and Kasper identified five factor including: instills confidence through caring, supportive learning climate, appreciation of life meaning, control versus flexibility , and respectful sharing  as effective factor on nursing students' appreciation of instructor caring behaviors [5].

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of training and instructors' caring behaviors. In these studies, personality traits, teaching capability, evaluation, creating self-confidence, creating respectful and supportive learning climate, presenting frequent feedback and interpersonal relationships have been defined as the main factors of instructors' caring behaviors [6-8]. In Karaöz's study in Turkey, elements such as human characteristics, moral necessity, effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, and therapeutic intervention were defined by nursing students as traits that should be included in the instructors' caring behaviors [9].

In similar studies, nursing students stated that the role of nursing instructors is creating a healthy learning environment and healthy work environment, flexibility, kindness, availability, presenting up-to-date information, strong support, commitment to ethical principles, and monitoring the scientific and practical performance of students [10]. In addition to students' behaviors such as humiliation, impoliteness, negligence, inaccessibility, ambiguous expectations of instructor of students' performance and inadequate feedback were defined as unprofessional behaviors of instructors [11,12].

Studies indicate that positive caring behaviors increase students' self-confidence, strengthen positive attitudes toward the profession, reduce anxiety, facilitate the learning of a nurse's roles and responsibilities, improve interpersonal relationships with others and increase motivation in the clinical conditions [8,13]. In contrast, dysfunctional interactions between clinical instructors and nursing students bring about negative feelings, stress, withdrawal, loss of confidence, frustration, emotional turmoil, learning disruption, feelings of inadequacy, fear of error and dissatisfaction in students [14,15].

Regarding the importance of instructors' caring behaviors in interacting with students and promoting the clinical learning process and owing to inadequate information about instructors' caring behavior, the current study aimed to determine the perception of nursing students of instructors' caring behaviors in Zanjan province.

**Methods**

The current descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in 2021 in the period (April to the end of September). The population of the study comprised all nursing students of bachelor degree from the 4th semesters onwards in Zanjan province (including students of nursing schools of Zanjan University of Medical Sciences and Azad University nursing schools in Zanjan and Abhar).

The sample size of this study has been estimated utilizing the standard deviation of the study by Zamanzadeh et al. [12]. Then, taking into account the 95% confidence interval, the standard deviation of 0.3 and the premise of 10% probability of sample loss among 545 students, the sample size of 248 people was calculated. Samples were selected through stratified random sampling. In this way, the semesters were regarded as a subgroup and the number of samples from each subgroup in relation to the size of that subgroup was selected by simple random sampling. Thus, 71 people from the fourth semester, 37 people from the fifth semester, 60 people from the sixth semester, 45 people from the seventh semester and 35 people from the eighth semester (248 people in total) were selected. Finally, 13 students who did not complete the questionnaire were excluded from the study. Participants' charactristics were employment to study in the 4th to 8th semesters of nursing, no history of transfer from another university and not using the nursing quota to be accepted in the course of nursing.

To collect data, a two-part questionnaire including demographic information and Nursing Students' Perception of Instructor Caring (NSPIC) questionnaire was used. Demographic information included age, gender, semester, grade point average, native, marital, and employment status.

The NSPIC was designed by Wade and Kasper in 2006 and has 31 items in 5 areas, including

instilling confidence through caring (11 items), supportive learning climate (10 items), appreciation of life's meaning (3 items), control versus flexibility (4 items) and respectful sharing (3 items). Instrument scoring is based on a 6-point Likert scale with fully disagree item (1 point) to fully agree (6 points). Therefore, the minimum score is 31 and the maximum score is 186. To be able to compare the scores in each area, owing to the difference in the number of items in different areas, the average score is calculated based on the Likert scale of 1-6. This tool has no cutting point and higher scores represent a more positive perception of the instructor's caring behavior. In this study, based on the total score obtained the score of 155 and above was considered desirable, the score between 124 and 154 was considered average, and the score below 124 was considered undesirable. Also, based on the average Likert score, a score of 5 and above was considered desirable, a score between 4 and 5 was considered average, and a score of less than 4 was considered undesirable.

NSPIC tool has been used in several studies in Iran [12] and abroad [5,6,16] and its validity and reliability have been evaluated. Reliability in Wade and Kasper's study using Cronbach's alpha was given as 0.97 [5]. In the study of Zamanzadeh et al., to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, the test-retest method was applied to 10 nursing students at two weeks' time interval and the Pearson correlation coefficient was estimated (0.94). In the above study, the questionnaire was translated into Persian and five professors fluent in English and Persian who did not interfere with the translation process confirmed the accuracy of the translation. Face validity was also confirmed through a survey by ten faculty members at Tabriz School of Nursing [12].

In the current study, the face validity of the questionnaire was evaluated through a panel of specialists (ten faculty members of Zanjan School of Nursing and Midwifery) and the reliability of the tool was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha=0.84$).

In order to collect data from the students, due to the prevalence of coronavirus and their absence in colleges, the link to the electronic questionnaire along with an explanation of how to study, goals and confidentiality of information, through cyberspace (WhatsApp or Telegram) was given to them and they were asked to think of the clinical instructor they had recently worked with and answer the questionnaire. Information was collected in person from students who were present in hospitals at the time of sampling due to internships.

Due to the normality of the data, parametric tests including descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation and 95% confidence interval) and inferential statistics (independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for data analysis were used in SPSS version 25 software.

**Results**
The results showed that most students participating in the study were female (54%), single (91. 1%), native (53.2%), at the age group of less than 22 years (57.9%), unemployed (72.8%) and had a grade point average of more than 16 (66.4%) (Table 1).

*Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables*

| Variable | | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 127 | 54 |
| | Male | 108 | 46 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **Age** | Less than 22 years | 136 | 57.9 |
| | More than 22 years | 99 | 42.1 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **semester** | Term 4 | 62 | 26.4 |
| | Term 5 | 35 | 14.9 |
| | Term 6 | 56 | 23.8 |
| | Term 7 | 45 | 19.1 |
| | Term 8 | 37 | 15.7 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **Grade point average** | Less than 16 | 79 | 33.6 |
| | More than 16 | 156 | 66.4 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **Being a native** | Native | 125 | 53.2 |
| | Non-native | 110 | 46.8 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **Marital status** | Single | 214 | 91.1 |
| | Married | 21 | 8.9 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |
| **Job statues** | Employed | 64 | 27.2 |
| | Unemployed | 171 | 72.8 |
| | Total | 235 | 100 |

The results regarding the instructors' caring behavior showed that from the perspective of the students participating in the study, the mean (Sd) of the total nursing instructors' caring behaviors was 126.37±14.70 and the mean score based on the Likert scale (1-6) was 4.18, which is in the average level. Also based on results of the study based on the Likert scale of 1-6, respectful sharing dimension with mean score of 5.8 and control versus flexibility dimension with mean score of 3.26 were among the highest and lowest caring behaviors used by instructors respectively (Table 2).

*Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Nursing Students 'Perceptions of Instructors' Caring Behavior*

| Variable | Mean (SD) | Mean score | Confidence interval of 95% |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Respectful sharing** | 15.26(4.26) | 5.08 | 14.71 -15.81 |
| **Appreciation of life meanings** | 13.68 (2.90) | 4.56 | 13.30 - 14.05 |
| **Instill confidence through caring** | 44.44 (4.69) | 4.04 | 43.84 - 45.04 |
| **Supportive learning climate** | 39.93 (7.30) | 3.99 | 38.99 - 40.87 |
| **Control versus flexibility** | 13.04 (4.82) | 3.26 | 12.42 - 13.66 |
| **Total** | 126.37 (14.70) | 4.18 | 125.56 -127.43 |

The results of independent t-test indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between different dimensions of instructors' caring behavior with some demographic variables like age, gender, grade point average, native status and employment status of students (p> 0.05), but between creating a supportive learning climate and marital status of students, there was a

statistically significant difference (t=-1.9, p=0.05) (Table 3). The results of ANOVA test on comparing the mean scores of students' perception of instructors' caring behavior based on the semester showed a statistically significant difference between the two dimensions of appreciation of life's meaning (p=0.02) and control versus flexibility (p= 0.004) (Table 4).

***Table 3: The results of T Test to Compare the Mean Scores of Caring Behavior Based on DemogrAphic Variables***

| Variable Dimensions of caring behavior | Gender | | | | Marital statues | | | | Job statues | | | | Grade point average | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male Mean (SD) | Female Mean (SD) | Statistical t Value | P-Value | Married | Single | Statistical t Value | P-Value | Employed | unemployed | Statistical t Value | P-Value | <16 | >16 | Statistical t Value | P-Value |
| Respectful sharing | 5.06 (1.89) | 5.11 (0.83) | - 0.27 | 0.78 | 5.17 (0.8) | 5.08 (1.46) | - 0.28 | 0.77 | 5 (0.79) | 5.12 (1.59) | - 0.55 | 0.58 | 4.91 (0.84) | 5.17 (1.63) | -1.3 | 0.19 |
| Instill confidence through caring | 4.01 (0.41) | 4.06 (0.43) | - 0.92 | 035 | 4.11 (0.38) | 4.03 (0.43) | - 0.8 | 0.41 | 4.02 (0.45) | 4.02 (0.45) | 0.85 | 0.39 | 4 (0.43) | 4.06 (0.42) | -1.03 | 0.3 |
| Appreciation of life meanings | 4.52 (0.96) | 4.59 (0.97) | - 0.51 | 0.60 | 4.76 (0.77) | 4.54 (0.98) | -1 | 0.31 | 4.51 (1.01) | 4.51 (1.01) | 1.18 | 0.23 | 4.48 (0.97) | 4.6 (0.96) | - 0.89 | 0.37 |
| Supportive learning climate | 3.96 (0.74) | 4.01 (0.72) | - 0.47 | 0.36 | 4.28 (0.77) | 3.96 (0.72) | -1.9 | 0.05 | 3.97 (0.79) | 3.97 (0.79) | 0.62 | 0.53 | 3.98 (0.69) | 3.99 (0.75) | - 0.18 | 0.85 |
| Control versus flexibility | 3.31 (1.12) | 3.21 (1.27) | 0.68 | 0.49 | 3.57 (1.42) | 3.23 (1.18) | -1.23 | 0.21 | 3.22 (1.25) | 3.22 (1.25) | 0.7 | 0.48 | 3.18 (1.13) | 3.29 (1.24) | - 0.69 | 0.48 |

*Table 4: The Results of ANOVA Test to Compare the Mean Scores of Caring Behavior Based on Demographic Variables*

| Variable<br><br>Dimensions of caring behavior | Semester | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester | Mean (SD) | Statistical F Value | df | P-Value |
| **Respectful sharing** | 4 | 4.99 (0.82) | 1.77 | 234 | 0.13 |
| | 5 | 5.7 (0.65) | | | |
| | 6 | 4.94 (0.96) | | | |
| | 7 | 4.94 (1.7) | | | |
| | 8 | 5.64 (0.88) | | | |
| **Instill confidence through caring** | 4 | 4 (0.43) | 1.16 | 234 | 0.32 |
| | 5 | 4.11 (0.43) | | | |
| | 6 | 4.06 (0.42) | | | |
| | 7 | 3.94 (0.45) | | | |
| | 8 | 4.1 (0.35) | | | |
| **Appreciation of life meanings** | 4 | 4.6 (0.89) | 2.98 | 234 | 0.02 |
| | 5 | 4.79 (0.75) | | | |
| | 6 | 4.7 (0.97) | | | |
| | 7 | 4.1 (0.71) | | | |
| | 8 | 4.54 (0.87) | | | |
| **Supportive learning climate** | 4 | 7.76 (0.83) | 2.24 | 234 | 0.06 |
| | 5 | 4.14 (0.73) | | | |
| | 6 | 4.06 (0.59) | | | |
| | 7 | 4 (0.76) | | | |
| | 8 | 4.09 (0.62) | | | |
| **Control versus flexibility** | 4 | 2.82 (1.09) | 3.97 | 234 | 0.004 |
| | 5 | 3.48 (1.35) | | | |
| | 6 | 3.21 (1.07) | | | |
| | 7 | 3.68 (1.12) | | | |
| | 8 | 3.33 (1.3) | | | |

The results of tukey post-hoc test showed that the observed difference between the 7th semester students and the 5th and the 6th semester students was in the dimension of appreciation of life's meaning (p<0.05). In other words, from the perspective of the 7th semester students, compared to the 5th and the 6th semester students, the instructors got lower scores in this dimension.

In addition, there was a statistically significant difference between the 7th semester and the 4th semester students in the control versus flexibility dimension (p<0.002). Thus, from the perspective of the 7th semester students, compared to the 4th semester students, the instructors got higher scores in this dimension (Table 5).

*Table 5: Comparison of the Mean of Appreciation of Life Meanings Based on the Semester in the Tukey Post hoc Test*

| Variable | Semesters | Semesters | Mean difference (SD) | P_Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Appreciation of life meanings** | Semester 4 | Semester 5 | - 0.18 (0.2) | 0.88 |
| | | Semester 6 | - 0.1 (0.17) | 0.97 |
| | | Semester 7 | 0.45 (0.18) | 0.11 |
| | | Semester 8 | 0.05 (0.19) | 0.99 |
| | Semester 5 | Semester 4 | 0.18 (0.2) | 0.88 |
| | | Semester 6 | 0.08 (0.2) | 0.99 |
| | | Semester 7 | 0.64 (0.21) | 0.025 |
| | | Semester 8 | 0.24 (0.22) | 0.82 |
| | Semester 6 | Semester 4 | 0.1 (0.17) | 0.97 |
| | | Semester 5 | - 0.08 (0.2) | 0.99 |
| | | Semester 7 | 0.56 (0.19) | 0.03 |
| | | Semester 8 | 0.15 (0.2) | 0.93 |
| | Semester 7 | Semester 4 | - 0.45 (0.18) | 0.11 |
| | | Semester 5 | - 0.64 (0.21) | 0.025 |
| | | Semester 6 | - 0.56 (0.19) | 0.03 |
| | | Semester 8 | - 0.2 (0.21) | 0.32 |
| | Semester 8 | Semester 4 | - 0.05 (0.19) | 0.99 |
| | | Semester 5 | - 0.24 (0.22) | 0.82 |
| | | Semester 6 | - 0.15 (0.2) | 0.93 |
| | | Semester 7 | 0.4 (0.21) | 0.32 |

## Discussion

The results of the current study indicated that from the students' point of view, the caring behaviors of nursing instructors are in average level.

In other words, nursing instructors fairly observe the principles of interpersonal caring behavior in relation to students, although it is necessary to improve the instructors ' caring behaviors to reach a more desirable level. In this regard, the study of Zamanzadeh et al. in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences evaluated the mean of total instructors' caring behaviors as 4.65 out of 6, which was slightly better than the present study [12]. Also, in the study of Taylan et al. in Turkey, the mean of total instructors' caring behaviors was slightly higher than the mean of the present study [17]. On the other hand, in a study conducted by Wafa et al. in Saudi Arabia and in a study conducted by Labrague et al. in four countries: India, Greece, Nigeria and the Philippines, the mean total caring behaviors of instructors was lower than the present study. In other words, nursing instructors in the present study had better caring behaviors than them [6,16]. Discrepancies in students' perceptions on instructors' caring behaviors in the above studies may be owing to differences in factors such as demographic variables (age and gender), personality differences, knowledge levels, attitudes and previous experiences, and cultural and social differences [12,18]. Studies indicate that educational systems and the type of curriculum, the duration of students' presence in hospital wards, the type of interaction with instructors, professional values, religious beliefs, health care systems and various working conditions are among the factors that can influence students' perception of instructors' caring behavior [17,19].

According to the results of the study, the highest mean of dimensions of instructors' caring behavior were related to the respectful sharing dimension. The dimension of respectful sharing includes issues associated with respecting students and their ideas and not imposing ideas on them [5]. According to students' perception, instructors had better performance in this regard, and students have identified behaviors that are based on mutual respect, confidence, and acceptance as the most frequent caring behaviors of instructors. The ability to communicate vividly, make respectful relationships with students in clinical conditions, and present constructive feedback are among the effective caring behaviors [16].

Also, according to the findings of the study, the lowest average dimensions of the instructors' caring behavior were related to the control versus flexibility dimension. The control versus flexibility dimension includes taking time off for students, creating flexibility in unexpected situations, fulfilling needs, and not using grades to control students [5]. Teachers' unpleasant reaction to students' errors and their unfair evaluation of students is one of the important obstacles in clinical training [12]. Compatible with the results of this study, the study of Zamanzadeh et al. in Tabriz and the study of Wafa et al. in Saudi Arabia also indicate that the highest and lowest means were related to the dimensions of respectful participation and control versus flexibility, respectively [12].

Unlike the current study, in the study of Labrague et al. the dimension instill confidence through caring had the highest mean and the lowest mean was related to the dimension of control versus flexibility [16]. In the study by Taylan et al. the highest and lowest mean dimensions of instructors' caring behavior were related to the dimensions of instilling confidence through caring and respectful sharing, respectively [18], which was not consistent with the present study.

Regarding the relationship between nursing students' perceptions of instructors' caring behavior and demographic characteristics, the results of the present study indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between different dimensions of instructors' caring behavior with age, sex, grade point average, native status, employment status and students' type of job.

Similar to the results of the present study, the study by Meyer et al. also showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between different dimensions of instructors 'caring behavior and students' age [20]. Contrary to the results of the present study, in the Fifer's study, there was a positive correlation between nursing students' perceptions of instructors' caring behavior with their age and a negative correlation with their employment status [21].

Also, based on the findings of this study, among instructors' caring behaviors there was a statistically significant difference between the dimensions of creating a supportive learning climate with students' marital status. From the point of view of married students in comparison with single students, the instructors were able to create a more supportive learning atmosphere. Moreover, in the present study, there was a statistically significant relationship between nursing students' perceptions of instructors' caring behavior in the dimensions of appreciation of life's meaning and control versus flexibility in terms of their semester. From the 7th semester students' points of view, compared to the 5th and the 6th semester students, instructors performed better in terms of appreciation of life's meaning.

Furthermore, in the control versus flexibility dimension, the 7th semester students significantly evaluated better the instructors' caring behavior compared to the 4th semester students. The reason for the difference between the perception of 7th semester and 4th semester students in the control versus flexibility dimension of the instructors' caring behavior can be attributed to the students' scientific and professional ability. Unlike the present study, in the study by Labrague et al. and also in the study of Meyer et al., there was no statistically significant relationship between the education level of nursing students and their perception of instructors' caring behavior [17]. It seems that in the current study, due to the increase of knowledge and clinical skills in the 7th semester students compared to 4th semester students, the behavior of instructors has been more flexible.

## Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that the perception of nursing students in Zanjan province on the caring behavior of instructors was in average level. From the students' point of view, nursing instructors did not perform well in areas such as control versus flexibility, creating a supportive climate and instills confidence through caring. Based on the results of this study, in order to improve the caring behaviors of nursing instructors during clinical training, it is recommended to hold training workshops for students and instructors.

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