

Causes of Incivility in Iranian Nursing Students: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Incivility among nursing students is a common academic problem. Knowing the causes of students' incivility will enable the faculty members and academic institutions to select correct strategies to deal with this problem. This study was conducted to explore the causes of incivility among nursing students from both educators' and students' points of view.

Methods: This qualitative content analysis study was applied in order to explore experiences and insights of 17 nursing lecturers and 9 nursing students who were selected through purposeful sampling and interviewed on the causes of incivility. Participants were selected among students and lecturers of nursing schools in Khorasan Razavi. The inclusion criteria for the students were having passed one educational term and for the lecturers having one year experience of teaching respectively. Data gathering was done using deep semi-structured interviews starting from March 2014 to March 2015.

Results: Three main categories extracted from the data were student related factors, teacher related factors, and organizational factors. Non-educational engagement, attracting attentions, lack of motivation, students' personality, and lack of experience were the subcategories of student related factors. Subcategories of teacher related factors included lack of skills, teachers' personal qualities, lack of experience, and incivility of teachers. Finally, the subcategories of organizational factors included no evaluation system for teachers and lack of understanding the organizational rules and regulations.

Conclusion: The results of this study indicated that factors related to students, teachers, and organization may lead to nursing students' incivility and clarified its dimensions. In order to develop a civil environment in nursing college, managers and educators' awareness should be promoted via various ways such as workshops.

KEYWORDS: Content analysis; Incivility; Nursing educator; Nursing students

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INTRODUCTION

In nursing education, incivility is referred to as unreflected destructive behaviors leading to physical or emotional distress in the people involved in education. If no intervention is done, it turns into a threatening situation.¹ The consequences of disruptive behaviors are interfering with learning atmosphere, especially in learning teams and collaborative learning.² Today's students are our future colleagues and if their incivility are not recognized and managed, they will change to uncivilized personnel.³ If the students are trained weakly in terms of personality, an irreversible damage will occur, such as interactional problems with colleagues, patients, and caregivers. Hazards for patients' safety, absence from workplace, changing the workplace, and personnel's physical and emotional health are secondary expenses.^{4,5}

Students' incivility is an increasingly growing problem in nursing academic society.^{6,7} Nursing education incivilities include interruption in class, disrespectful behavior toward teacher or other students, lack of students' attention to class, delayed arrival and early leaving the class, lack of academic honesty, and bullying. Incivilities lead to poor learning atmosphere, poor behaviors in the workplace, and violence.^{8,9}

Students' incivility may cause negative physical, emotional and psychological effects on faculty members, such as stress, anxiety, illness, job dissatisfaction, behavioral changes, as well as harmful impacts on work setting.¹⁰ In addition, the students' incivility may negatively impact the functions of college authorities.¹¹ On the other hand, violent behavior that nursing education has experienced in recent years is one of the most drastic effects of incivility. Students' incivility in the classroom and clinical settings disrupts the teaching or learning.¹² Colleges, as a part of community, are not immune from incivility and the complications of academic incivility. In clinical setting more than 50% of nurses experience uncivilized behaviors, and more than 90% of them witness abusive behaviors

toward others.¹³ Few studies are published about nursing students' incivility management worldwide, particularly in Iran.¹⁴ Moreover, in today's world with shortage of nurses, lack of competent nurses is a major concern,¹⁵ so it is necessary to recognize the causes of incivility and revise them.¹⁶ Since the universal aim of education is improving civility and respect, the role of higher education is training researchers, professionals and useful citizens.¹⁷ Medical sciences students should not only be expert in sciences and skills, but also acquire high standards of morality and humanity.¹⁸ Unprofessional behaviors have occurred both in teachers and students and studied in nursing, dentistry and pharmacology,¹⁹⁻²¹ however, no study has been conducted on the causes of incivility. As recognizing the causes of incivility is necessary to prevent and treat the students' incivility, so there is a need to conduct this research. Lack of rules and regulations for managing the students' behaviors makes them think they are not responsible as to incivility. Therefore, researchers focused on documenting rules and regulations for incivilities and necessity of familiarization of teachers with them.²² If managers and teachers recognize the cause of incivility, they can provide a sounder atmosphere for improving communication between students and teachers as well as training committed and expert people.

When the variables of a concern such as causes of students' incivility are unclear, a qualitative approach is most revealing than quantitative methods. Thus, a qualitative approach was used to take a holistic perspective about the causes of incivility. In addition, no study has been done in Iran to explore the causes of students' incivility; therefore, a qualitative study was applied using open ended questions in order to explore the causes of incivility in nursing students from both educators' and students' points of view.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the aim of the research, i.e. exploring

the cause of incivility, we used the qualitative approach to understand human feelings and discover the latent meaning in daily experiences;² also, to understand the factors which play a role in forming uncivil behaviors, we used qualitative content analysis. This method was applied for extracting the main themes and exploring the existent patterns in the data. It is also an appropriate method for achieving valid and dynamic results affecting deep understanding of contextual data in order to form new knowledge, and present reality and practical guide for practice. Indeed, this method with qualitative reduction and categorization of data attempts to understand the meaning of data.²³

This was a qualitative study using content analysis. Participants were nursing students and teachers who were either working or studying in Khorasan Razavi Universities of Medical Sciences. Firstly, participants were selected by purposeful sampling. Since we used individual interviews for data gathering, the participants who had encountered with uncivil behaviors and y could explain their experience in more detail were selected. For this purpose, questions were asked about the colleges' officials, educators, and participants (snowball sampling). Then, it continued regarding maximum diversity and stopped with arriving data saturation; in this

step, we found that further interviews don't provide different information to develop a new category about the causes of students' incivility. Therefore, saturation of data was confirmed with no new data achieved in the three last interviews. In order to maximize the variation in participants' selection, the researchers considered factors such as age, gender, educational degree, teaching experience, type of university, and having an organizational position in the university. The study continued from March 2014 to March 2015. Time and place of the interviews were selected by mutual agreement with participants. Inclusion criteria for the teachers were at least one year history of teaching either in the classroom or in clinical settings and those for the students were a history of 2-terms of study in the university. Also, they participated in the study and interview voluntarily and were able to present their experiences. Students were 18-33 years old and the teachers were 30-55. In qualitative studies, sample size is not fixed, so the researcher should continue the sampling process until no new idea is acquired.^{24,25} In the present study, the samples were 17 teachers: 8 males and 9 females and 9 students: 4 males and 5 females (Tables 1, 2). Participants were selected considering maximum diversity. The

Table 1: Faculty members' demographic characteristics

Code	Age	Gender	Educational degree	Teaching experience	Having responsibility
1	49	Male	MS	23	Yes
2	38	Female	MS	6	No
3	48	Male	MS	17	No
4	47	Male	MS	7	No
5	35	Female	Ph.D	11	Yes
6	29	Male	MS	2	No
7	51	Female	MS	27	No
8	50	Female	MS	24	No
9	38	Female	MS	12	No
10	34	Male	MS	5	No
11	35	Female	MS	10	No
12	48	Male	MS	13	No
13	49	Female	MS	25	Yes
14	47	Female	MS	18	No
15	48	Male	MS	7	Yes
16	52	Female	MS	25	Yes
17	46	Male	MS	20	Yes

Table 2: Students' demographic characteristics

Code	Age	Gender	Educational degree	Term	University
1	30	Female	BS	8	Mashhad
2	22	Male	BS	8	Neyshabour
3	33	Female	MS	1	TorbatHeydaryeh
4	23	Male	BS	7	Gonabad
5	20	Male	BS	5	Mashhad
6	22	Male	BS	5	Sabzevar
7	22	Female	BS	6	Mashhad
8	23	Female	MS	2	Neyshabour
9	23	Female	MS	3	Gonabad

interviews were started with questions such as: "What do you think about the students or teachers' incivility?", "How is incivility practiced?", "What are the conditions leading to incivility?" They were continued with probing questions such as "Would you please explain more?" The participants were interviewed by the first author for 30-90 min. All interviews were recorded and listened several times; then, they were typed in Word 2007. They were analyzed by qualitative content analysis which is applied for subjective interpretation of the textual data. In this method, codes, categories, and themes could be recognized. Content analysis is far from extracting objective content of the text; it is applied for extracting hidden themes and patterns from the participants' data.²⁶ After several listening, transcribing, reading and immersing session in the data, a big picture of data was resulted; meanings were extracted, key ideas were bolded and the codes were categorized based on their relations. Different strategies for credibility of the data analysis such as peer check techniques and member check were also applied. In member checking, codes of interview were returned to the participants, and they confirmed the researchers' representing ideas. For peer checking, the researchers coded and categorized the data independently and where there was a disagreement, discussions and clarifications were done in order to reach a consensus.²⁷

Mashhad University of Medical Sciences (MUMS) ethics committee approved the proposal (approval code 921903/1/114).

The aim of study was explained before the interview for the participants. They were insured that they could stop their participation in any stage of the study. All of them were informed of the confidentiality of data and kept them anonymous; then they gave their written consent.

RESULTS

Analysis of the interview data led to emergence of 900 primary codes, reduced to 42 sub-subcategories, 10 subcategories, and eventually 3 main categories were developed.

In this study 3 main category included incivility cases related to students, teachers and the organization. Each category had some subcategories (Table 3).

Student Related Factors

Educational engagement: One of the main causes of incivility was non-educational engagement such as matrimony, distance of living place, and involvement in other activities except studying. These factors led to lack of discipline and behaviors such as delay, absence, and making teachers present intensive courses; thus, tiredness and drowsiness are the consequence. Due to the matrimony of some students and being away from their home town, they make other students and teachers have an intensive course and also they were absent in some classes. So, other students and teachers were oppressed.

"Not holding certain classes, they plan not come to class and at the end they want

Table 3: Causes of nursing students' incivility: Categories and subcategories

Category	Subcategory
Student related factors	Educational engagement Attracting attentions Lack of motivation personality Lack of experience
Teacher related factors	Lack of expertise Personality Teachers' uncivil behavior
Organization related factors	Lack of assessment system Lack of understanding rules and regulations Organizational atmosphere

to stop the class early, go home and do home care. They were absent from the beginning of the educational term. They returned to their homes and liked to read. Because of this they hold us and the teachers under pressure (student 4, 23 years old, male).

Attracting attention: One of the other causes of incivility is attracting attentions which could interfere with class discipline and mental distraction of the teacher and other students. These students ask some unnecessary questions, come late to class and leave early, talk, sit or behave differently

Teacher 7 stated: *"I felt this question is not related to class and students would like to present themselves in the class (51 years old, female)."*

Lack of motivation: Lack of motivation is a result of lack of interest, disappointment about future career, lack of a role model in nurses and feeling of inferiority compared to other students such as medical students. Low scores, coming late to class and leaving early, lack of interest and lack of attention to educational issues are signs of lack of motivation and presenting incivility. Student 5 said: *"But unfortunately our faculty students are really limited, i.e. they would not like to learn even the information they are presented to or they study just at the night before the exam (20 years old, male)."*

Student personal quality: Low understanding, unfairness, insistence on incivility and student's gender are the other causes of incivility in this category based on the participants' experiences. Some teachers

believe that low understanding of students is the cause of incivility. They believe that students have not acquired an acceptable level of sociocognitive development; therefore, incivility appears. *"I have taught students whose behaviors could not be comparable between the years of studies and some years' later."* (Teacher 2, 38 years old, female)

Lack of experience: Lack of insight, learning incivility from others, misunderstanding the teachers' behaviors and words as well as lack of following rules and regulations of the class and clinical setting are signs of the students' lack of experience. Students are newcomers who have been transferred from high school to the university. They do not know the value and importance of studies. Lack of experience causes less insight and some destructive behaviors towards students, teachers and the educational system. Lack of insight causes students to ignore their lesson plan and lessons presented to them as well as not trying to be professional and not to do their homework. Teacher 10: *"The foresighted students value the present opportunities; of course, such students are less found in BSc programs (34 years old, male)."*

Teacher Related Factors

This category included lack of expertise, personality, and incivility.

Lack of expertise: Class management is one of the necessary skills for teachers. It is both scientific ability and communication with students during the class as well as control on class atmosphere. Content should be rich,

because if it is poor, students will get tired, class will be monotonous and unattractive for students. Inability to control the class due to lack of expertise causes less control on class, leading to high incidence of incivility. Student 2 said: *“If a teacher could not manage his class and present his/her lessons effectively, students have to listen to his hands-free (22 years old, male).”*

Personality: The sub-category of teachers' personality is breaking boundaries by teachers; prejudices; lack of self-confidence; contradiction between words and behavior; and lack of tolerance, control on themselves, sympathy and grooming. According to the participants' experience, teachers specially novice ones and in some cases expert teachers had not enough self confidence. They reported some feelings such as fear of conflict; avoidance of reminding, feeling of worthlessness, incompetency, and lack of respect from others and feeling of useless effort. Teacher 5: *“Some time, a student had a disrespectful behavior and I tried to be silent based on my experience and I left the situation. Indeed, I had no contradiction with him (35 years old, female).”*

Teachers' uncivil behavior: Teachers are role models of students. If they behave disrespectfully, students are to be allowed to have uncivilized behavior and cause furiosity and several reactions of students which are uncivilized as well. Some teachers' incivility occurs when teachers do not follow Islamic rules, are not updated scientifically, do not try properly to train students, have unclear objective, do not guide the students, do not trust students, do not assess students fairly, do not involve students in learning, would like to prove themselves, focus on personnel's words, stigmatize the students, speak badly, scrutinize and behave stereotypically. In an Islamic society, teachers should be sensitive to Islamic rules. If they do not follow the Islamic rules, students will not also be sensitive to follow them. Student 6 talked about lack of following these rules in performing nursing procedure by his teacher. *“On the day 2,*

she said “let's go to change the patients' dressing”. All the patients were females. We were four single male nursing students; it is not correct to change the abdominal dressing of a young even middle age female. (Student 6, 22 years old, male)”

Organizational Factors

Subcategories are lack of assessment system for teachers, lack of understanding rules and regulations and organizational atmosphere.

Lack of assessment system for teachers: Teachers, as the staff for training students, should evaluate scientific issues, morality and their performance both at their entrance and during their work. Incivility of students could be the result of increasing faculty and lack of competent teachers, lack of motivation in teachers and a lack of integrity for observing rules and regulations and making subjective and personal judgments for incivility or even no reply to incivility. If teachers are not evaluated properly, their attention diverts from education to other aims. One of the issues for ignoring education is concentration of universities on research in the faculty evaluation system. Teacher 11 said: *“When we talk to teachers, they say the ranking is determined based on research. Therefore, it makes no difference for them to do their educational activities, get a high score from students, spend time for in the class or clinical setting or merely do research (35 years old, female).”*

Lack of understanding rules and regulations: The organization and faculty members could effectively prevent incivility by informing the newcomer students about the rules and regulations. If students do not know the educational rules, students do not know them even after the occurrence of the behavior. Student 5 said: *“I had the worst experience in the previous term; I lost 2 sessions during 12 work days. I do not know the allowed number of sessions for being absent (20 years old, male).”*

Organizational atmosphere: Different organizations behave differently toward their students and teachers based on their policies.

Some educational organizations follow regulations strictly so students' freedom is restricted and incivility will be less. On the contrary, the other organizations had a student-centered system; this freed atmosphere and let the students behave uncivilized. *Teacher 5* said: *"In that university with student-centered system, the teachers were afraid of expressing students' behavior, but in this university students get direct warning easily (35 years old, female)."*

DISCUSSION

According to the findings, incivility can be seen in students, teachers, and organizations. There are a few findings related to study's direct causes of incivility in nursing students. So, the findings were compared to the results of other studies. In the present study, causes of incivility were non-educational engagement; attracting attention, lack of motivation, students' personality, and lack of experience were student-related factors for incivility. In a study about student stressors, it has been mentioned that students have multiple responsibilities and do other jobs. These include obligations of the university and family, financial pressures, time management, lack of support from teachers, incivility of teachers, mental problems and personal issues. These findings are similar to those of the present study.²⁸ As the above study showed non-educational engagements for reasons such as family and financial pressures were the factors related to the students' incivility; this is in agreement with the present study. Lack of teachers' support and incivility of teachers were the other factors that led to the students' incivility; in comparison with our study that showed lack of teachers' skill in management of the students' behaviors including inability to communicate with students, and inability to support the students was in line with the results of the present study. Students' personality was one of the influential factors in incivility; the results of the present study confirmed this. Lack of motivation was of the incivility causes which was in agreement with the results of

Clark's study, i.e. she showed lack of interest and lack of preparedness as the signs of lack of experience influencing incivility;²⁹ it was reported that students experience high pressure and high workload which causes incivility. The present study was not in the same line with this finding. It seems that it is due to lack of strictness for BSc students in Iran.^{30,31} Lack of expertise, teachers' personal qualities, lack of experience, and teacher's incivility were the teacher-related factors for emerging incivility. In the present study, breaking boundaries by teachers, prejudice, lack of self confidence, contradiction between words and behavior, lack of sympathy, lack of tolerance, lack of self control, and lack of sincerity were found. In a study, the feeling of superiority of the teacher was reported as a violation of moral principles which is in agreement with the findings of the present study.^{32,33} The important incivilities on the side of the teachers were lack of following Islamic rules, lack of updating, unclear objectives, no guide for students, lack of trust on students, unfair evaluation, discrimination and humiliation of the students, threatening students, lack of attention to students, lack of attention to boundaries, trying to prove themselves, focusing on personal words, stigmatizing the students, using bad words and intonation, stereotypic behavior and lack of involving students in learning; these were different to some extent with Clark's study. In his study, incivility of the teachers from students' point of view were humiliating the students, weak teaching method, poor communication skills, arrogant behavior, misusing students in the presence of colleagues, and threatening the students for drop out were mentioned.²⁹ The difference was related to lack of following Islamic rules and lack of students' involvement in learning which could be related to cultural differences between Iranian and Western societies. Another study supported the findings and indicated that the teachers do not know that their incivility could lead to students' incivility and they make hostility between students and teachers by humiliating their students inadvertently.³⁴ Another study reported that in nursing education, students

paid attention to teachers' incivility and when teachers behave in an uncivil manner, they are affected negatively; they get angry and unsatisfied, their communication breaks, some problems arise in their learning atmosphere and level of stress increases both in students and teachers.³⁵ In another study, unclear expectations and objectives of students and teachers were reported as causes of incivility;³⁶ this was in agreement with the findings of the present study. Reaction of students towards teachers' incivility was feeling of injury, hopelessness and weakness; eventually, the students' experienced emotional strain and disrespectful behaviors towards teachers formed because nothing was worthwhile for them.³⁰ Students with higher levels of stress have negative coping strategies and experience higher burn out.³⁷ Lack of assessment system for teachers, and lack of understanding rules and organizational atmosphere were organization-related factors. Organizational atmosphere which supports the students and teachers in preventing incivility is in agreement with Hunt's study in which it is reported that organizational support causes people to become secured in organizational norms and effectively brings about organizational success. It leads to increase in their coping and acquiring higher levels of performance.^{38,39} Organizational support also lowers the stress and minimizes its negative effects on performance.⁴⁰ It is effective in preventing incivility. The finding of lack of understanding the rules is in agreement with the above study. It is believed that lack of rules and regulations for management of the students' behavior could produce incivility in students. It should be emphasized in documenting the rules and regulations for incivility; it is necessary to inform the teachers of these behaviors and their causes.²² Lack of teacher evaluation as the cause of incivility was not found in other studies. In a study, it was shown that the students' incivility has been attributed to causes such as the sense of entitlement among students, being unprepared for class, distrust of the faculty member as the director of the classroom.⁴¹ These findings show that students are not familiar with the rules of

the colleges and these results are in agreement with those of the present study.

Limitation of this study was disregarding the grounding causes of incivility due to family and society because we assessed the incivility causes only from the teachers and students' point of view.

CONCLUSION

Several factors contribute to students' incivility. Managers and teachers should recognize aforementioned factors enhancing the students' incivility and try to prevent them. In addition, according to the results it is suggested that faculty members should involve the students in the education, and they should not demonstrate uncivil behaviors. Also, the organization must clarify the rules and regulations; and all of three groups including students, faculty members, and managers should be sensitive to incivility. So, it is suggested that sufficient educational programs should be held, via workshops, about the causes of these behaviors for the faculty members and managers in order to increase their knowledge about the students' incivility and promote their civil behaviors.

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