



Original Article

Nursing students' experiences of faculty incivility: A qualitative exploratory study

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ARTICLE INFO

Received 17 October 2019  
Accepted 02 December 2019  
Published 01 April 2020

Available online at:  
<http://npt.tums.ac.ir>

**Key words:**  
academic incivility;  
nursing ethics;  
nursing faculty;  
qualitative research

ABSTRACT

**Background & Aim:** Academic incivility has a common problem in academic settings including nursing schools. The aim of the present study was to explore nursing students' experiences of faculty incivility.

**Methods & Materials:** This was a conventional qualitative content analysis approach. Fourteen bachelor's nursing students were purposefully recruited from two faculty of nursing in, Karaj, Iran. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via the conventional content analysis.

**Results:** We derived two main categories from students' experiences; "hidden faculty incivility" and "obvious faculty incivility". Hidden incivility contained four subcategories, includes lack of mastery over the subject matter, inattentiveness to the learning climate of the class, inability to manage the class, and unfair evaluation. Obvious incivility also included the three subcategories of speech-behavior contradiction, authoritative behavior, and unconventional behavior.

**Conclusion:** This study suggests that faculty incivility can have various aspects and beyond obvious offensive behaviors which mainly pertains to faculty interaction and teaching skills. Nursing faculties and nursing education authorities need to acquire adequate knowledge about the different aspects of faculty incivility and employ strategies for its prevention and alleviation.

Introduction

The Nursing Code of Ethics requires all nurses to respect colleagues, students, and patients. This ethical principle confirms that any violence, disrespect, or threatening behavior is unacceptable in nursing (1, 2). Nonetheless, incivility is common in nursing schools (3).

There are different definitions for incivility; the most well-known of which is "disrespect to others' rights" (4). Accordingly, academic incivility is defined as behavior incoherent with the classroom

atmosphere, which may appear in varying degrees and forms (5). In nursing education, incivility is an unpleasant event, which affects faculty, and students in all features of their educational experience (6). Some examples of academic incivility are the use of cell phone in the classroom, saying bitter and bold words, late to the class, napping in the class (7), bargaining with faculties for better marks and less homework, disputing with classmates (8), and even physical threats or harms to others (9). These examples denote that academic incivility is learners' disrespectful behaviors (7); however, evidence shows that incivility is formed in a bilateral process, in which both students and faculties play an important role. In other words, while faculties complain

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about the prevalence of incivility and impolite behaviors among students (7-10), students also report instances of incivility on the part of their faculty (7, 11, 12), which is rising increasingly (4).

As a major source of stress, faculty incivility in classrooms causes different psychological problems (such as depression and anxiety) for students, weakens professional relationships, and disrupts teaching-learning process (12). Moreover, incivility in nursing schools can turn students and nurses into lawbreakers and bring them different problems in their relationships with colleagues, patients, and other people (7, 13).

An important point respecting incivility is the differences in students and faculties' perceptions of incivility, so that a behavior, which is perceived by students as lacking civility, may be considered by faculties as a usual behavior (14, 15). A study in Oman confirmed statistically significant difference between students and faculties' perceptions of the types and the frequencies of uncivil behaviors in classrooms (16). This finding highlights the necessity of assessing different aspects of incivility rather than merely focusing on students' impolite and learning-disruptive behaviors (10, 15). As a result of an integrative review conducted on incivility in undergraduate nursing education, the role of faculty in reduction of incivility is even greater than students as their ability of setting the atmosphere for teaching and learning. This point shows the issue should be investigated carefully (17).

It seems exploring students' experiences of faculty incivility can identify problematic behaviors, facilitate their modification, and promote respectful behaviors in academic settings. Although numerous studies have been done into the concept of incivility in different countries (4, 9, 14, 18, 19), there is

limited data on this context-based concept in Iran, particularly from the narrow perspectives of nursing students (3, 20). There was a need to conduct further studies (21), to find a greater extent of knowledge on incivility seen both parts, faculty and student (20). Therefore, the present study was conducted to explore nursing students' experiences of faculty incivility.

## **Methods**

### *Design*

This qualitative exploratory study was done using the conventional qualitative content analysis approach. As a research method, qualitative content analysis helps categorize data and identify latent and manifest themes or patterns. In conventional content analysis, researchers avoid using predetermined categories and attempt to develop new categories from the data (22).

### *Participants*

Study participants were bachelor's nursing students in two faculty of nursing in, Karaj, Iran. Sampling was done purposefully and kept on up to data saturation, i.e. until no new codes, subcategories, or categories were extracted from the data (23). The more progress in interviews, the more precision in hand picking of students based on the gap of data. It was based on different student characteristics include sex, performance level, school year and university setting. As with all qualitative studies, the desire to attend the study was the most important inclusion criteria.

### *Data collection*

Data collection was performed in March–July 2016 via face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews held by the first and the second authors, whom were faculty

members. Therefore, the participants knew the interviewers. Interviews were done at the students' faculty in a private room in the department. The main interview questions were, "Can you explain about events which disrupt your learning in the classroom?" "How do you define classroom incivility as a student?" "What behaviors do you describe as being uncivil to the teacher in the classroom?" Besides, probing questions were used based on students' answers. Interviews were held in students' preferred time and place and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 to 45 minutes.

#### *Data analysis*

The data were analyzed through Lundman and Graneheim's conventional qualitative content analysis approach (24). Qualitative content analysis means to extract obvious and latent meanings of the raw data. The results of conventional content analysis are beyond the raw data and include latent and manifest themes and patterns (25). For data analysis in the present study, recorded interviews were first transcribed. Each interview transcript was read multiple times for a general understanding of its content. Then, the transcript was divided into meaning units, which were in turn condensed and coded. The codes were compared with each other and grouped in subcategories and categories according to their similarities and differences. Data analysis was done by the first author and supervised by the coauthors. In case of any disagreement among the authors about the codes, subcategories, or categories, they were discussed until a general consensus of opinion was reached. In order to facilitate the analysis process, MAXQDA 10 software was used.

#### *Ethical considerations*

This study received the approvals of the Institutional Review Board and the Ethics Committee of Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Karaj, Iran (ethical approval code: IR.ABZUMS.1394.V.55). All participants were informed about the study aim and ensured about the voluntariness of participation and withdrawal and about the confidential data management. Before each interview, written informed consent was obtained from each student.

#### *Rigor*

Credibility was ensured through, peer checking, and member checking. After data analysis by authors, emerging categories were reviewed by two qualitative researchers and their comments mentioned. In addition, two participants reviewed the open codes of their interviews and confirmed the primary coding. For achieving transferability, the authors tried to present thick description of study concept. Dependability and conformability were ensured through providing a detailed picture of the research process to allow for data audit.

#### **Results**

Fourteen 20-24-year-old students (six females and eight males) were recruited and interviewed (table 1). Their experiences of faculty incivility were grouped into two main categories, namely "hidden faculty incivility" and "obvious faculty incivility". Together with their subcategories, these two categories are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participants

No participants	Sex	School year	University setting	Performance level
1	Male	2	State university	17.5
2	Male	3	State university	17
3	Female	2	State university	16.5
4	Female	3	State university	15
5	Female	4	State university	19
6	Male	2	State university	16.5
7	Female	3	State university	15
8	Male	4	State university	14.5
9	Female	3	Azad university	16
10	Male	3	Azad university	15
11	Male	2	Azad university	17
12	Male	2	Azad university	15.5
13	Female	2	Azad university	16
14	Male	3	Azad university	14

**Table 2.** Nursing students' experiences of faculty incivility

<b>Hidden incivility</b>	lack of mastery over the subject matter
	inattentiveness to the learning climate of the class
	inability to manage the class
	unfair evaluation
<b>Obvious incivility</b>	speech-behavior contradiction
	authoritative behavior
	unconventional behavior

1- Hidden faculty incivility

*1-1 Lack of mastery over the subject matter*

According to most of the participants, faculty's attendance at class without adequate preparation and mastery over the intended subject matter is an example of faculty incivility, which is usually taken for granted. The most obvious examples of lack of mastery were serious mistakes in teaching, lack of up-to-date knowledge, inability to maintain the integrity of the educational materials during the presentation, incoherency between the materials presented by the faculty and the textbooks, failure to provide practical examples and useful experiences,

repetitious presentations of a single subject, uncertainty over the accuracy of the provided materials, and sharing irrelevant memories and materials.

*Classmates say that the instructor provides erroneous materials. They recommend to avoid listening to what the instructor presents and to study textbooks instead. When students feel that their instructor provides nothing more than textbooks, they become reluctant to listen to what the instructor presents. Such fact disrupts the class (P. 10).*

### *1-2 Inattentiveness to the learning climate of the class*

Another subcategory of hidden faculty incivility was faculty's inattentiveness to the learning climate of the class. According to the participants, faculty's inactive and unprofessional presence in the class disrupts the class. Ineffective communication with students, refraining from seeking students' feedbacks, inattentiveness to students' individual characteristics, lack of appropriate eye contact with students, the use of inappropriate educational technology, and failure to follow teaching standards, are examples.

*Some instructors just rapidly read materials from the slides without considering the students' patience and class conditions. Sometimes, one hundred slides are going to be presented without any break. Accordingly, the instructor doesn't notice that some students are napping in the last row, while those in the first rows are suffering. Such practice is annoying for students (P.1).*

### *1-3 Inability to manage the class*

Inability to manage the class reflected a wide range of problems from severe stringency and rigid discipline to indecision in managing the class. While acknowledging the importance of regulations to the class, students noted that faculties' unfair punishments and inflexibility in managing students' faults cause or aggravate incivility. They believed that faculties need to take the students' conditions into account and provide appropriate feedbacks. On the other hand, faculties' indecisiveness to class management can cause anarchy in the class and make it inappropriate for learning.

*Some faculties are too martinet about students' late class attendance and prevent students from entering the class in case of even a one-minute delay. Of course, rules and regulations are good; but, students' conditions should also be taken into account. Some students may have delays due to an urgent need (P.4).*

*I think that it is the worst characteristic of a teacher to allow delayed entry to the class. Some teachers allow students to enter the class even in the middle of the class and call the roll at the end of the class. Consequently, some students attend the class with 30 to 45-minute delays (P.12).*

### *1-4 Unfair evaluation*

Unfair evaluation was the last, but not the least, subcategory of hidden faculty incivility. According to students, some faculties cause or aggravate incivility through doing unfair evaluations which are not congruent with the taught materials. They may assign hard and futile homework, and manipulate students' marks without providing them any clear explanation.

*Some instructors are apparently very good and I feel that they are not uncivil; but they manipulate students' marks. I think this is an instance of incivility (P. 5).*

## *2- Obvious faculty incivility*

### *2-1 Speech-behavior contradiction*

Students believed that the contradiction between faculties' speeches and behaviors is among the most important examples of obvious incivility. Such contradiction was observed in the faculties' management of students' faults such as the use of cell phone in the class or delayed attendance in the class. Students noted that faculties with

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speech-behavior contradiction cannot expect civility from their students.

*I believe that the first person who should follow a rule is the maker of that rule. Otherwise, his subordinates cannot tolerate it. For instance, when an instructor makes a rule, but not follow it, we understand that he is not a decisive person and therefore, we learn not to follow that rule (P. 1).*

### *2-2 Authoritative behavior*

Faculties' authoritative behavior toward students was another subcategory of the obvious incivility main category. Most participants believed that authoritative behavior is a striking example of incivility. Some instances of authoritative behavior as reported by the students, were inflexibility, paternalistic view, and no permission to students to participate in the process of learning, indifference to students' ideas, ridiculing students' ideas, and providing them with negative feedbacks. The last two instances prevent students from participating in class discussions or answering faculties' questions.

*Some instructors never allow students to express their ideas and do not pay attention to our suggestions. They are the only persons who know what they are going to do and usually do whatever they prefer (P. 13).*

### *2-3 Unconventional behavior*

Some participants noted that faculties are not expected to wear unusual clothes, give inappropriate laughter, behave stubbornly toward students, use inappropriate humors, and fall out with students. In other words, they considered faculties' behaviors which do not fit social norms as instances of incivility.

*Some instructors fall out with one or two students and leave the class, for example, due to students' whispering in the class. Such behaviors are unacceptable (P. 7).*

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore nursing students' experiences of faculty incivility. Findings fell into two main categories namely "hidden faculty incivility" and "obvious faculty incivility". This study revealed that there are instances of hidden faculty incivility which are usually taken for granted. A faculty may not have obvious incivility; however, his/her behavior may be unsuitable for an instructor. Moreover, some faculties may apparently be very polite, but their behaviors question their instructional role and identity.

In an assessment of academic knowledge transfer practices in Pakistan, having enough knowledge and the ability to carefully transfer it to the students, are mentioned as the professional duties of a faculty (26). The lack of these professional duties was considered incivility by our study participants, too. This issue gets highlighted when teacher begins lesson with the prior awareness of his or her lack of full preparation for that. In such case, students are well aware of the fact that the deliberate neglect of the teacher caused for waste of their time in that class, where the importance of their learning is ignored by the teacher. These findings also are in line with the findings of previous qualitative studies conducted in Iran (3, 20) and Egypt (14). They mention to wasting of class time, distraction, irresponsible, inappropriate and aggressive behaviors as the incivility of faculties.

Moreover, assessing the connection between students' justice experience and perceptions of faculty incivility revealed that faculties' inattention to the learning climate of the class and also to students' questions can give students a sense of incivility (27), because students expect their faculties to consider their interests and involve them in class discussions and learning climate, actively. In a cross sectional study of Incivility behavior in a nursing and midwifery department in Iran, RafieeVardanjani et al. (2016) revealed that not being prepared for sessions (with 40.7%), is the most disturbing behavior in nursing education (28). Also, in a note by Knepp (2012) when the teacher do not involve students in the education process or discourage their questions or comments, gives the message that his or her class can be a place for incivility (7). In this way, in an Iranian letter to editor, delivering and receiving feedbacks appropriate to teaching and learning, to and from students, paying attention to the student knowledge situation and creating collaborative learning environments have been mentioned as some strategies to reduce incivility (29).

The findings of the present study also indicated faculty's inability to manage the class is another example of hidden incivility. This finding is indicative of students' expectations of faculties' abilities. As indicated by the results of a study conducted in Iran, guided democracy as an effective strategy of faculties for incivility management in nursing education help learners develop professional performance (21). This finding denotes that students consider disorganized behaviors as usual for themselves and expect faculties to manage students' behaviors. In the other words, they attributed their own incivility to the faculties' inability to manage the class.

Knepp (2012) believes that faculty who are primarily research-focused may do not have interest to invest time and effort in teaching and classroom management techniques (7). This proposition highlights that faculties should develop their communication and interpersonal skills, as well as other education and research based skills, to better understand the views of students and to manage the class interactively (29).

Unfair evaluation and feedbacks were the other examples of hidden faculty incivility. Students considered it uncivil to get an unfair mark or to undergo an unfair evaluation, which is not congruent with the taught materials. Although previous studies also reported biased evaluation or faculty's inappropriate use of his/her power for manipulating students' marks as instances of injustice (7, 18, 29), the unfair evaluation subcategory in the present study was a new concept which directly questioned faculty's evaluation criteria. Of course, students' unfamiliarity with the purposes and criteria of evaluation may contribute to their perceptions of evaluation fairness. Students usually consider evaluations as subjective and biased, think that they merit better marks, and easily overlook their faults (30). Nilson (2016) takes a slightly different approach about the causes of incivility in this subcategory. She argues, increased diverse in college campus results in a broad array of student attitudes and expectations about learning and the academic environment (31). It proposes more preparations for both faculty and students to have good mutual educational expectations and relationships.

The other main category of the study was "obvious faculty incivility" which points to those behaviors which are clearly disrespectful. Students considered faculties' behaviors which contradicted their speeches

as well as their unconventional behaviors as permissions for the students to show the same behaviors. In a study of incivility in the Iranian nursing training system, Rad et al. (2015) highlight that faculties are role models for students, hence, their disrespectful, impolite, or inappropriate behaviors can affect students' behaviors (3).

In addition, it is believed that more uncivil behaviors occur in classrooms with faculty members who do not exhibit indicators of prosocial skills (e.g., eye contact) or possess as insincere and callous in the eyes of students. When students suspect that the teacher does not care about them, they are more likely to engage in incivility. (7) Moreover, faculties' unrealistic expectations from students or putting students under pressure can be considered by students as much uncivil and unacceptable as behaviors such as the humiliation or ridiculing of students (4, 9, 32). On the other hand, students expect their faculties to have neither authoritative, aggressive (27), and rigid behaviors, nor very close relationships, humor, and inappropriate laughter (33). They need a healthy faculty-student relationship which is within predetermined limits. Such relationship can positively affect their behaviors and professionalization. Faculties' inattentiveness to these expectations and needs and their inability to establish healthy relationships with students can cause incivility in classrooms. In this way, RafieeVardanjani et al. (2016), conclude mutual respect is necessary for effective teaching and teachers play a crucial role in creating a respectful learning environment via employing of these skills (28).

Interviews were held by two instructors of the participating students. This might have required students to censor some of their ideas. Of course, we attempted to

overcome this limitation by selecting those students who were more comfortable to share their ideas with their faculties, taking into account the criteria mentioned in method section. Moreover, we ensured students that their responses will not have negative outcomes for them.

## **Conclusion**

This study showed that faculty incivility might be obvious or hidden. A faculty may apparently be very polite; however, she/he may not have enough knowledge about the courses and educational issues (such as teaching and evaluation skills) and also could not manage the class environment appropriately. Students consider these points as incivility. Nursing faculties and nursing education authorities need to acquire adequate knowledge about the different delicate and invisible aspects of faculty incivility and employ strategies for its prevention and alleviation with regarding to new generation students.

The findings of the present study may encourage university authorities to organize regular workshops for faculties on effective class management and effective communication skills with students. Such workshops have great importance for clinical majors such as nursing, in which students and faculties need to have strong and healthy relationships with each other. In addition, academic nursing leaders have a unique role in creating a supportive environment for discreet behaviors and free dialogue opportunities. They should institutionalize the culture of encouraging respectful communication in educational settings. Furthermore, considering these skills as core criteria in recruiting faculty members may be result in selecting better and civil faculties.



## Acknowledgment

The authors thank all the participants during the different stage of this study.

## Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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