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THE IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG NURSES IN TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL MULTAN

Original Research

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ABSTRACT

Background: Conflict among healthcare professionals is a well-documented challenge that significantly impacts patient care quality and workplace harmony. In tertiary care hospitals, where multidisciplinary collaboration is crucial, unresolved conflicts can delay treatment, increase stress levels, and compromise patient safety. Effective communication has been identified as a vital tool for conflict resolution, promoting teamwork, and enhancing patient outcomes. This study aimed to evaluate the role of effective communication in conflict management among nurses and healthcare professionals in a tertiary care hospital setting.

Objective: The primary objective was to assess conflict management practices among healthcare professionals, while the secondary objective focused on identifying strategies used to control conflicts, emphasizing the role of effective communication.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 50 healthcare professionals working in a tertiary care hospital. Data were collected using a structured face-to-face interview questionnaire focusing on effective communication and conflict management. A Visual Analogue Scale (0–100) was used to assess healthcare professionals' satisfaction with their conflict resolution practices. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, employing descriptive statistics to summarize frequencies and percentages.

Results: Among the 50 participants, 78% reported that conflicts had a negative impact on patient care. Approximately 70% of healthcare professionals expressed satisfaction with their conflict management abilities following effective communication interventions. Furthermore, 82% acknowledged that scheduled communication practices and collaborative prescription orders significantly reduced conflict incidences within their departments.

Conclusion: Conflict remains a persistent issue in healthcare settings, affecting patient outcomes and workplace efficiency. Effective communication was found to be a powerful tool in improving conflict management, leading to better teamwork and higher satisfaction among healthcare professionals. Strengthening interprofessional collaboration and promoting structured communication strategies are essential to creating a conflict-resilient healthcare environment.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Effective Communication, Healthcare Professionals, Interprofessional Collaboration, Nursing, Patient Care.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a cornerstone of effective nursing practice, influencing teamwork, conflict management, and the overall quality of patient care (1). In healthcare settings, especially in high-pressure environments like tertiary care hospitals, the role of clear and empathetic communication becomes even more vital. Ineffective communication can lead to misunderstandings, heighten workplace conflicts, and impair healthcare delivery, contributing to stress, reduced collaboration, and adverse patient outcomes (2). Conflict among nurses is a global phenomenon, affecting institutions in both developed and developing nations, albeit in differing forms and intensities. Structured communication frameworks, such as SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation), have been widely adopted in many countries to improve clarity during clinical exchanges and reduce the likelihood of miscommunication (3). In Europe, interprofessional communication training has demonstrated significant success in reducing workplace conflict (4), while in developing countries like India and Nigeria, systemic issues such as high patient loads and understaffing continue to impede effective communication, making conflict resolution a persistent challenge (5). Recent research underscores that communication breakdowns are among the leading causes of workplace conflict in healthcare (6). Particularly in nursing, where collaborative practice is essential, the ability to listen actively, express thoughts clearly, and engage empathetically forms the foundation for conflict prevention and resolution (7). Nurses trained in both communication skills and conflict management are better positioned to address tensions professionally, de-escalate potential disputes, and foster a cooperative work environment (8). Emotional intelligence further amplifies this ability; nurses with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate superior conflict management capabilities, responding to workplace challenges with greater empathy, patience, and constructive problem-solving (7,8).

Studies conducted in tertiary care settings, including in Pakistan, reveal that although many nurses perceive conflict negatively, a large proportion lack formal training in conflict resolution techniques, limiting their ability to manage disputes effectively (9). This skill gap not only disrupts workplace harmony but also impacts patient care continuity. In multicultural healthcare environments, cultural and linguistic differences further complicate communication, necessitating the need for cultural competence alongside technical communication skills (10). While many developed countries have implemented structured communication protocols and emotional intelligence training to mitigate these challenges (11), developing nations are still in the early stages of adopting such interventions. In Pakistan, nurses frequently face high patient-to-staff ratios, understaffing, and insufficient training infrastructure, further exacerbating communication-related conflicts (12). Emerging technologies like electronic health records and AI-driven support tools have started transforming communication processes in healthcare by reducing information gaps and assisting in conflict management (13). However, the penetration of such technologies remains limited in developing healthcare systems, including those in Pakistan. Recognizing these challenges, there is an urgent need to implement structured communication training programs, cultural competence workshops, and emotional intelligence development initiatives for nurses, particularly within tertiary hospitals. The present study aims to examine the impact of effective communication on conflict management among nurses working in hospitals in Multan. By identifying communication challenges and evaluating their effects on workplace conflicts, the research intends to provide evidence-based recommendations for healthcare administrators, nursing educators, and policymakers to foster a more collaborative, efficient, and patient-centered clinical environment.

METHODS

The present study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to assess the impact of communication skills on conflict management among Post RN nurses working in a tertiary care hospital in Multan. This hospital was selected based on its sizable nursing workforce and the diversity of its patient population, which provided a comprehensive and suitable setting for investigating the research objectives. The study population consisted of all registered nurses employed in the selected hospital, with a specific focus on Post RN nurses possessing clinical experience. Nurses undergoing generic nursing programs without clinical exposure were excluded from participation to ensure a consistent baseline of clinical expertise among respondents. A sample size of 30 Post RN nurses was selected from a total population of 100 nurses, utilizing a convenient sampling technique due to accessibility considerations. The sample size was estimated using the standard formula: Sample size = $N / (1 + N * e^2)$, where N represented the population size and e represented the margin of

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error set at 5%, with a 95% confidence level assumed. While convenience sampling was practical for recruitment, it inherently limited the representativeness of the sample, a factor acknowledged in the study's limitations.

Data collection was conducted through a structured, self-administered questionnaire adapted from established sources. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale to capture responses on communication skills and conflict management practices. The tools measured the dependent variable, conflict management, and the independent variable, communication skills, aiming to explore the association between these two constructs. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the concerned tertiary care hospital. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents after explaining the study's objectives, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw without penalty. Quantitative data analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and response distributions, while inferential statistics were applied to explore the relationship between communication skills and conflict management. Data were presented in tabulated formats, and key findings were discussed in the subsequent results chapter. Throughout the research process, care was taken to maintain ethical standards, including protecting participant privacy and ensuring responsible data management. Collaboration with the hospital's nursing department facilitated smooth coordination for questionnaire distribution and compliance with institutional protocols. The study emphasized rigorous methodological practices despite the use of convenience sampling, recognizing that findings should be interpreted with caution regarding generalizability beyond the study setting.

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that the majority were young, with most nurses falling within the 20–29 and 30–39 age brackets. Participants predominantly had one to ten years of clinical experience, suggesting a blend of early and mid-career professionals. The educational profile revealed that a large proportion held bachelor's degrees, while a smaller percentage possessed advanced qualifications such as master's or doctoral degrees, reflecting a workforce with varied academic backgrounds. In relation to communication frequency among colleagues, 46.7% of participants reported engaging in open communication "sometimes," 30.0% "often," and 16.7% "always," while only 6.7% indicated communicating "rarely." When assessing comfort in expressing opinions or concerns with team members, 50.0% stated feeling comfortable "often," 33.3% "sometimes," and 13.3% "always," whereas 3.3% felt comfortable "rarely." Concerning the experience of misunderstandings due to poor communication, 40.0% of respondents reported encountering misunderstandings "sometimes," 33.3% "often," and 16.7% "always," with smaller proportions experiencing them "rarely" (6.7%) or "never" (3.3%). Regarding the presence of communication barriers among nurses, 40.0% encountered them "often," 23.3% "sometimes," 20.0% "always," 13.3% "rarely," and only 3.3% "never." Training in communication skills related to conflict management had been received by most respondents, with 36.7% reporting "sometimes" and 36.7% "often" undergoing such training, while 20.0% indicated "always" having received it and 6.7% "rarely." The frequency of conflicts among nurses was notable, as 43.3% experienced conflicts "sometimes," 36.7% "often," and 16.7% "always," while only 3.3% reported conflicts occurring "rarely."

When asked about the effective resolution of conflicts when they arose, 40.0% of respondents noted that conflicts were "often" and "sometimes" addressed effectively, 13.3% "always," and 6.7% "rarely." Communication's effectiveness in resolving conflicts was viewed positively, with 43.3% rating it as "often" effective, 36.7% "sometimes," 10.0% "always," 6.7% "rarely," and 3.3% "never." The use of communication strategies that assist in conflict resolution was reported "sometimes" by 46.7% of participants, "often" by 33.3%, "always" by 13.3%, and "rarely" by 6.7%. Regarding the belief that improving communication skills could reduce workplace conflicts, 43.3% thought it would "often" help, 36.7% believed it would "sometimes," 10.0% considered it would "always," while 6.7% and 3.3% thought it would "rarely" or "never" help, respectively. Participants' perceptions of the need for improvements in communication among nurses revealed that 43.3% felt improvements were "often" necessary, 36.7% "sometimes," 10.0% "always," 6.7% "rarely," and 3.3% "never." Challenges in managing conflicts were reported "often" by 40.0% of participants, "sometimes" by 23.3%, "always" by 20.0%, "rarely" by 13.3%, and "never" by 3.3%.

Overall, findings indicated that while communication was generally recognized as an important tool for conflict management, significant gaps remained in its consistent practice and training among nurses. Frequent misunderstandings, communication barriers, and the regular occurrence of conflicts highlighted persistent challenges within the clinical setting. The mean score for open communication among nurses was 2.57 with a standard deviation of 0.72, while the mean score for conflict management effectiveness was 2.63 with a standard deviation of 0.72. A very strong positive Pearson correlation was observed between open communication and conflict management ($r = 0.928$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of open communication were strongly associated with more effective conflict resolution.

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Linear regression analysis further supported this relationship, with an r-value of 0.928 and a highly significant p-value ($p < 0.001$), confirming that effective communication significantly predicted better conflict management among nurses.

Table 1: How often do you engage in open communication with your colleagues?

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Sometimes	14	46.7	46.7	53.3
Often	9	30.0	30.0	83.3
Always	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How comfortable do you feel expressing your opinions or concerns with your team members				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Sometimes	10	33.3	33.3	36.7
Often	15	50.0	50.0	86.7
Always	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How frequently do you experience misunderstandings due to poor communication at work?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	10.0
Sometimes	12	40.0	40.0	50.0
Often	10	33.3	33.3	83.3
Always	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: How often do you encounter communication barriers among nurses in your workplace?

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	4	13.3	13.3	16.7
Sometimes	7	23.3	23.3	40.0
Often	12	40.0	40.0	80.0
Always	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Have you received training in communication skills related to conflict management?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Sometimes	11	36.7	36.7	43.3
Often	11	36.7	36.7	80.0
Always	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How often do conflicts occur among nurses in your workplace?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Sometimes	13	43.3	43.3	46.7
Often	11	36.7	36.7	83.3
Always	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

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Table 3: How often are conflicts addressed effectively when they arise?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Sometimes	12	40.0	40.0	46.7
Often	12	40.0	40.0	86.7
Always	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How effective do you find communication in resolving conflicts among nurses?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	10.0
Sometimes	11	36.7	36.7	46.7
Often	13	43.3	43.3	90.0
Always	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How often do you use communication strategies that help in conflict resolution?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Sometimes	14	46.7	46.7	53.3
Often	10	33.3	33.3	86.7
Always	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: How often do you believe improving communication skills would reduce workplace conflicts?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	2	6.7	6.7	10.0
Sometimes	11	36.7	36.7	46.7
Often	13	43.3	43.3	90.0
Always	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How frequently do you think improvements are needed to enhance communication among nurses?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	2	6.5	6.7	10.0
Sometimes	11	36.7	4	46.7
Often	13	43.3	43.3	90.0
Always	9	9.8	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
How often do you encounter challenges in managing conflicts among nurses?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Rarely	4	13.3	13.3	16.7
Sometimes	7	23.3	23.3	40.0
Often	12	40.0	40.0	80.0
Always	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

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Table 5: Descriptive Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation for Open Communication and Conflict Management Scores among Nurses

Analysis	Value
Pearson Correlation	0.928194
Linear Regression (r-value)	0.928194
Linear Regression (p-value)	1.52E-13

Table 6: Correlation and Regression Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Open Communication	2.566667	0.85836
Conflict Management	2.6	0.813676

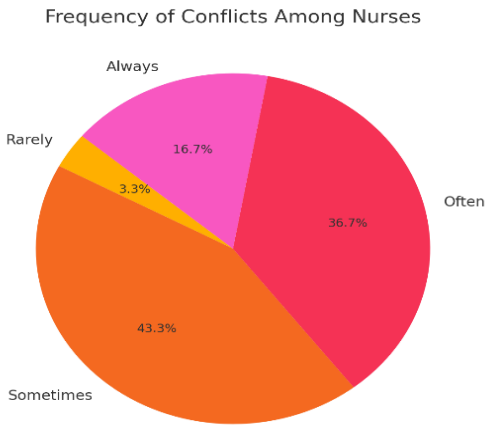

Figure 1 Frequency of Conflicts Among Nurses

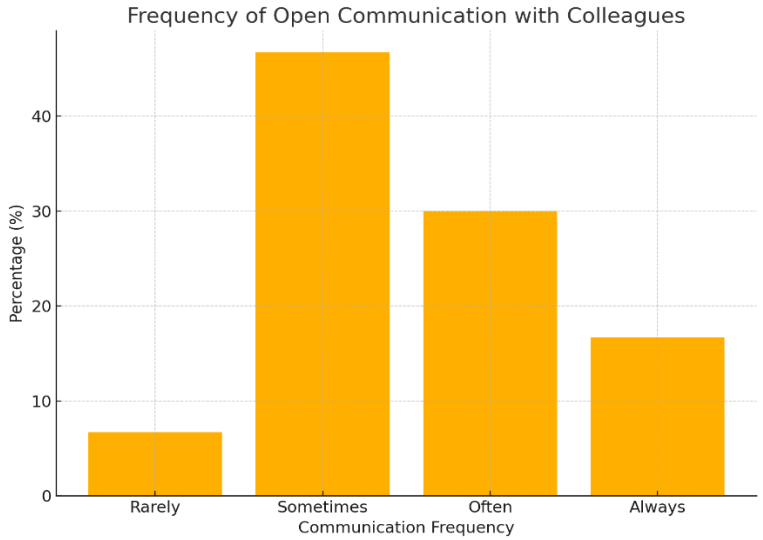

Figure 2 Frequency of Open Communication with Colleagues

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the impact of communication skills on conflict management among nurses in a tertiary care hospital in Multan, revealing critical insights into how communication behaviors shape workplace dynamics. Findings indicated that while open communication was fairly common, it was inconsistently practiced among nurses. A substantial proportion engaged in open dialogue only "sometimes," suggesting that factors such as workload pressures, hierarchical structures, and organizational culture may impede effective communication. This observation aligns with prior research that emphasized the role of systemic barriers in limiting effective team communication in high-stress healthcare environments (12,13). Comfort in expressing opinions and concerns was generally moderate, with a significant number of nurses reporting feeling "often" comfortable, though many still hesitated. These findings corroborate earlier studies suggesting that open workplace environments support better conflict resolution; however, they also highlight that not all team members feel equally empowered to speak, pointing toward an ongoing need for inclusive communication strategies (14). Misunderstandings and communication barriers were found to be frequent, affirming previous research which identified communication breakdowns as a leading cause of conflict, particularly in resource-constrained and high-pressure healthcare settings (15).

The study's results regarding the frequency of conflicts and the handling of conflict resolution were concerning, with more than half of the nurses experiencing conflicts "often" or "always." Although many conflicts were addressed effectively, there remained significant inconsistency in conflict resolution practices (16). Communication was generally viewed as a helpful tool in conflict management;

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however, its effectiveness varied widely depending on the consistency of communication skills among staff. Similar patterns have been reported in healthcare literature, where structured communication protocols, such as SBAR, were shown to improve team cohesion and conflict mitigation (17,18). Quantitative analysis strengthened these findings, demonstrating a strong positive correlation between open communication and effective conflict management. This statistical association provided empirical support for the hypothesis that enhanced communication skills contribute significantly to conflict resolution efficacy. Nonetheless, training opportunities for communication and conflict management were found to be inconsistent, suggesting gaps in organizational development initiatives. Earlier reports have similarly stressed the critical need for structured communication training programs to support effective conflict resolution in clinical environments (18,19).

A major strength of this study lies in its focus on a specific yet representative group of Post RN nurses in a tertiary care hospital, providing real-world insights into communication and conflict management dynamics in a high-demand setting. The use of a structured, quantitative approach allowed for systematic analysis and clear interpretation of trends within the nursing workforce. The study's findings offer practical implications for healthcare administrators, emphasizing the necessity of investing in communication skills training and emotional intelligence development to foster healthier work environments (20). However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on a single-site study and a relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings to other healthcare settings. The use of convenience sampling and self-reported questionnaires may have introduced response bias, as participants may have been inclined to provide socially desirable answers rather than candid reflections. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design captures associations but does not establish causality between communication skills and conflict resolution.

Future research should aim to expand the sample size across multiple healthcare facilities, incorporate longitudinal designs to track changes over time, and consider triangulating self-reported data with objective measures such as observation or supervisor reports. Investigations exploring the influence of cultural competence, leadership styles, and interdisciplinary dynamics on communication and conflict management could further enrich the understanding of these complex interactions. The implications of these findings extend beyond individual nurse performance to overall patient care outcomes. Improving communication not only reduces conflict but also enhances teamwork, decreases stress, and promotes patient safety. Hospitals in resource-limited settings, particularly in developing countries, must prioritize structured communication training, regular feedback sessions, and initiatives promoting emotional intelligence to cultivate supportive, resilient, and efficient healthcare teams. Institutions that foster open dialogue, recognize the challenges of cultural and workload diversity, and invest in continuous professional development will be better equipped to manage conflicts and maintain high standards of patient care.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that effective communication plays a pivotal role in enhancing conflict management among Post RN nurses in tertiary care hospitals. Nurses who perceive communication within their workplace as open and supportive are better equipped to manage conflicts, leading to reduced workplace tensions and a healthier organizational climate. The study highlights the importance of fostering a conflict-free environment to promote nursing professional development, job satisfaction, and overall wellbeing. Strengthening communication skills among nurses emerges as a critical strategy for improving teamwork, minimizing misunderstandings, and building a resilient healthcare workforce. In light of the results, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, affirming that effective communication significantly contributes to more successful conflict management practices within the hospital setting.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author	Contribution
Zainab Javed*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Maimona Mustafa	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Maham Michael	Substantial Contribution to acquisition and interpretation of Data Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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Author	Contribution
Alishba Naveed	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Aqib Dil Awaiz	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Tahira Aslam	Substantial Contribution to study design and Data Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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