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Relationship Between General Health, Communication Skills, and Moral Reasoning in First-Year Medical Students of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The health of medical students, who will become integral members of the healthcare team in the future, is crucial for the overall health system. Additionally, moral reasoning—defined as the justifications made for moral issues and dilemmas— has been identified as a cognitive component of ethics. It is considered essential for the quality of clinical performance among doctors, which requires not only competence in scientific and technical knowledge but also proficiency in communication, value management, moral sensitivity, evaluation skills, and the ability to navigate ethical conflicts. Therefore, medical students are expected to possess these skills or to develop them throughout their medical education. The purpose of this study was to investigate the general health of first-year medical students and its relationship with moral reasoning and communication skills, framed within a model applicable to medical students.

Methods and Materials: In this descriptive-analytical study, 145 first-year students of Bandar Abbas Medical School were included in the census method. After obtaining informed consent, the students were presented with three questionnaires: the Communication Skill Inventory Jerabek, General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and Rest's Defining Issue Test. The questionnaires were completed electronically and in person by self-administered method. The data were analyzed using SPSS and Amos version 24 software.

Results: The results showed that about 50% of students encountered difficulties in at least one area of public health. A significant proportion of these students demonstrated adequate communication skills, while half exhibited a conventional level of moral reasoning. Additionally, around 40% were classified at the post-conventional level of moral reasoning. The modified model's fit indices (RMSEA: 0.64) indicated that after removing one of the predictor variables—communication skills—the model adequately fits the data. This finding suggests that communication skills do not significantly impact a person's health; instead, students' moral reasoning score serve as a more effective predictor of their overall health.

Conclusion and Discussion: Our findings display that first-year students require attention and healthcare support. Also, the results of the model revealed a bidirectional relationship between moral reasoning and communication skills. However, these two predictor variables do not simultaneously influence the public health variable; only moral reasoning can affect health. In other words, the greater the development of ethical reasoning has a significant impact on health. In other words, the greater the development of ethical reasoning, the better an individual is equipped to address psychological issues and challenges. Therefore, we recommend implementing more effective assessments to ensure the well-being of medical students from their first year and to enhance their mental health by providing training in the principles of moral reasoning.

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