

## Nurses' Knowledge Regarding Legal and Ethical Responsibilities and its applications

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**Abstract:** Deficiency in knowledge related to legal and ethical responsibilities could expose nurses to illegal situations in nursing practice as general and also expose patients to illegal and unethical treatment specifically in psychiatric departments. This study aims to assess level of nurses' knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities and its applications, using an exploratory, descriptive correlational design. This study was conducted on all available nurses (n=110) working in psychiatric departments at time of the study, to collect needed data the researcher use two tools, personal characteristics data sheet, and structured self-administered questionnaire that consists of four branches; legal knowledge (19 items), application of legal knowledge (9 items), ethical knowledge (4 items) and application of ethical knowledge (20 items). Main results indicates that most (90.9 %) of the studied nurses have moderate level of knowledge regarding to legal and ethical responsibilities and level of application in both is low. Less than three quarter (70.0%) of studied nurses have ethical knowledge and more than two third (64.3 %) of them have legal knowledge. Based on this results the researchers asks the hospital management to conduct educational, and training programs about legal and ethical responsibilities with focus on its application in all departments especially to nurses working in psychiatric departments to remember them that they deal with unaware patients and they are not known their rights to request by it. Follow up from side of nursing managers to investigate and analyze the ways nurses use to treat patients and fix it and if it related to codes of conduct.

**Key words:** Legal knowledge. Ethical knowledge. Application. Nurses.

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### I. Introduction:

Deficiency in knowledge related to ethical and legal responsibilities could expose nurses to illegal situations in nursing practice as general. With a growing awareness of rights in a democratic set-up like Egypt after evolution, the nurses should know the basic legal and ethical aspects when deal with mentally ill patients (Kumar et al., 2011). The ethical aspect deals with standards of conduct and moral judgment. All nurses with different levels must accept and respect the rights, value and dignity of all patients and peers, also treat them equally without looking to their medical conditions or personal characters.

Codes of ethics for the nursing profession tend to focus on professional behavior and making sure that decision-making is patient driven as much as possible. A nurse also has a number of ethical responsibilities relating to the profession of nursing and her specialty to maximize the quality of health care delivery. One of a nurse's primary ethical responsibilities is to work with the patient to provide care that maximally enables the physical, emotional and social well-being of the patient.

Legal issues are what the nurse must tail as a law in a professional way or the duties of nurses legally permitted with the care of patients with physical and mental illness (Shrestha and Jose, 2014). Nurses who are aware of their rights and duties in legal matter are better able to protect themselves against liability or loss of professional licensure and in turn their awareness protect their patients (American College of Healthcare Executives, 2011);

Legal responsibilities is the umbrella under it nurses follow many roles; meeting all type of needs especially biological and sensitive one, so, the legal and ethical scope of care are essential for all team working in a nursing setting as it emphasizes on the rights of patients and the quality of care they receive (King and Broom, 2012; Modupe and Oyetunde, 2013). Nurses play vital role in health care setting, they accountable for providing care to the patients based on acceptable standards of ethical and legal knowledge principles (Chitty and Beth, 2007; Gomez-et al., 2012).

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### **Significance of the study:**

Duty of care is a fundamental aspect of nursing, and many nurses consider this to be an important part of their professional duties as a nurse. However, the legal underpinnings of duty of care are often overlooked, and, as such, nurses may be unsure about when to act if they encounter emergency situations or serious incidents (Dowie, 2017). The researchers observe that a little studies were done to assess nurses' knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities and its applications in different nursing specialties, especially to nurses working in psychiatric departments; so the researchers intent to conduct this study to assess if those nurses know and apply legal and ethical responsibilities.

### **Aim of the study**

To assess level of nursing staff knowledge regarding to legal and ethical responsibilities and its applications

### **Research Hypothesis**

Nurses working in psychiatric departments will experience high level of knowledge regarding to ethical and legal responsibilities and its application

## **II. Materials and methods**

**Research design:** This study utilized exploratory, descriptive correlational design.

**Setting:** The study was carried out in psychiatric departments at Assiut University Hospital.

**Subjects:** all available nurses who approved to share in the study that they were (110).

**Tools of the study:** The collection of data was achieved using self-administered questionnaire. It consisted of two parts: Part one: Personal characteristics of studied nurses (Age, sex, marital status, experience in psychiatric nursing, professional qualification, job title and in-service education).

Part two: Structured self-administered questionnaire, adapted with due acknowledgement from Kumar Mehta, and Kalra (2011), questionnaire comprised of 52 items divided into four subscales; legal knowledge (19 items), application of legal knowledge (9 items), ethical knowledge (4 items) and application of ethical knowledge (20 items). Scoring system: The responses for questionnaire were as follows: one grade was given when response yes and zero when the response was no. "All scores were collected and then transformed into a percent score. A score of 0-30% was considered as "lower level of knowledge, a score of 30-45% was considered as moderate level of knowledge and "higher level of knowledge from 40 to 60%.

### **Validity and reliability**

Five experts from faculty of nursing representing (two professors, one assistant professor and two lecturers) in the field of education at Assiut and Quena universities evaluated the validity of the questionnaire, then it was interpreted into Arabic using the translate-re-translate process. The reliability of the study tool was assessed in a pilot study by measuring their internal consistency using Cronbachs alpha is (0.894) for study questionnaire, thus showing a high degree of reliability.

### **Operational design**

**Preparatory phase:** This phase took about two months from March to April 2019.

The researcher spent this time in reviewing the available literature pertinent to the study topic. Additionally, Arabic translation and back translation of the study tool was done, and they were checked by experts for validation. **Pilot study:** A pilot study applied on a sample of 10 % of nurses in study setting to test the applicability and reliability, and the clarity of study tool (questionnaire) and to evaluate the time required to answer it. It also assisted to test the possibility and appropriateness of the study settings. Data gained from the pilot were investigated and no amendments were done.

**Data collection phase:** Data were collected from nurses working in the study setting (nursing departments) at Assiut University Hospitals. The questionnaire sheet was self-administered filled; one of the researchers was accessible all the time to simplify any item that needed clarification to the contributor. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes for each contributor to be filled. The whole duration for data collection took about two months from May to June 2019.

**Administration design:** To conduct this study at the selected settings a formal approval was gained from the Assiut University Hospitals administrator, and from the director of nursing through a formal letter from the faculty of nursing at Assiut University.

### **Ethical consideration**

Research protocol was agreed by the Nursing Administration Department and ethical committee in the Faculty of Nursing, there is no risk for the study subjects during application of the research. A formal authorization to conduct the study was obtained from the responsible authorities. Oral agreement was taken from participants. Confidentiality of gathered information and privacy of the participants was

assured. Participants have the right to reject to participate or drawing from the study without any rational at any time.

#### **Statistical analysis:**

The data were tested for normality using the Anderson-Darling test and for homogeneity variances prior to further statistical analysis. Categorical variables were described by number and percent (No, %), where continuous variables described by mean and standard deviation (Mean, SD). where compare between continuous variables by t-test \and ANOVA Test. A two-tailed  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. We are used person Correlation to Appear the Association between scores. All analyses were performed with the IBM SPSS 20.0 software.

### **III. Results**

#### **3.1. (Table one): Percentages distribution of studied nurses according to their personal characteristics.**

The data in this table illustrated that the studied nurses were 110, more than half (56.4%) of them ageing from 30 to 40 years old, less than two third (58.2) of them were female, the majority of them (85.5%) were married, and had nursing secondary school diploma, (45.5 %) of them had experience from 5 to 10 years in psychiatric nursing, and lastly less than three quadrant (70.9 %) of studied nurses attending training courses mainly in University administrative and Mental health hospital.

#### **3.2. (Table two): Means and standard deviations of legal and ethical Knowledge, and its application.**

We notes in table 2 the high mean score was related to legal knowledge (14.8, 1.78) with low application (3.64, 0.75). Comparing with ethical knowledge that has a low mean score (2.8, 0.48,) with high application (7.27, 1.17).

#### **3.3. (Table three): The relationship between legal and ethical knowledge, its application, and total knowledge with personal characteristics of the studied nurses.**

The data in table 3 indicates there is a statistically significant differences of ethical knowledge with gender and years of experience (0.004\*\*, 0.035\*), also there is a highly statistical significant difference between total knowledge and educational level (0.002\*\*). In addition to presence of a statistical significant difference between application of ethical knowledge and age (0.045\*). It is observed that there is no statistically significant differences between marital status and attending training courses with legal and ethical knowledge, its applications, and total knowledge

#### **3.4. (Figure one): Percentages of legal and ethical knowledge, and its application of studied nurses.**

The Figure (1) reveals that (70.0%) of studied nurses have ethical knowledge compared with legal knowledge (64.3. %). Also, (45.5. %) of them apply ethical knowledge compared with apply legal knowledge (40.4. %). It is notes that total knowledge of studied nurses were represent (54.8. %).

#### **3.5. (Figure two): Levels of ethical and legal knowledge of studied nurses (n=110).**

The data in figure (2) demonstrates the majority (90.9%) of the studied nurses have moderate level of legal and ethical knowledge while only (9.1 %) of them have low level of it.

### **IV. Discussion**

All nurses must have adequate ethical and legal knowledge concerning nursing practice according to different specialties. Our study was conducted with the purpose of assessing nurses' knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities and its applications. In general, as revealed in figure (1) it was observed that more than half percent of the studied nurses were represent the total knowledge of both legal and ethical, this indicates that level of knowledge is quietlow and it is in line with (Rajesh et al., 2011) who found knowledge deficit in both the legal and ethical areas among their studied nurses. Also, with a study conducted by Ashalata Devi, (2017) titled nurse's awareness on legal and ethical responsibilities in nursing, demonstrated that nurses had inadequate understanding of legal and ethical terms.

In our study, also it is observed, that ethical knowledge and its application is quietly high than legal knowledge and its application among studied nurses. This is may be related to their experience (from 5-10 years) make them aware of ethical knowledge when they are deal with mentally ill patients. From researcher point of view, Egyptian people are empathy and kind these are a trademarks character. This results in line with the study conducted in Baghdad by Qahtan et al., (2017) who stated that most of nurses showed a good level of knowledge about ethical issues in mental health nursing, the study conducted by Osingada et al., (2015) who concluded that only 15% of studied nurses were demonstrated low knowledge in nursing ethics (scored 50%). Also this result in line with The study conducted by Verghese et al., (2016) who concluded that more three quarter of nurses had average knowledge on legal aspects in patient care and only 10% of nurses had good knowledge,

Our study results demonstrated that the majority of studied nurses have a moderate level of knowledge (legally and ethically) figure (2). this result congruent with the study conducted by (Kumar et al., 2013) among

30 nurses, regarding their knowledge of legal and ethical responsibilities at psychiatric center of Jaipur, Rajasthan concluded that majority of them have a moderate level of knowledge. In addition to, the study conducted by (Kau et al., 2014) confirmed that majority (82.00%) of participants have middling level of knowledge regarding legal and ethical concepts.

In current study results declares that there were a strong significant relationship between total legal and ethical knowledge and education level of the studied nurses (Table 3). This means that nurses' knowledge is increased with education level and in our study 85.5% of nurses are graduated from diploma nursing and only 7.3% graduated from baccalaureate degree (B.Sc.) nursing. In a comparative survey conducted to assess knowledge of legal responsibility in patient care among nursing students, Ludhiana observed that B.Sc. nursing graduates have well legal responsibilities knowledge than the diploma nurses. (Rajesh et al., 2011).

The current study results showed that there were strong significant relationship between ethical knowledge and gender, experience. Osingada et al., (2015) conceded that there was no association between gender and level of knowledge. The current study results showed that there were strong significant relationship between application of ethical knowledge and age. From researcher point of view as it's known experience increased with aging, different opinions from side of previous researchers in the same context, in constant, Losa Iglesias et al., (2014) showed that there was remarkable differences were found between nurses of different ages and how they obtained their knowledge, also Moulding et al., (2014) who emphasized knowledge for performing actions as a function of their previous experience at the same actions and such personal abilities and attitudes. In the same context, Annuar et al., (2017) found that there was no relation between the age and level of knowledge. Moreover, Verghese et al., (2016) found that there were no relationship between the level of legal and ethical knowledge in patient care and age, gender, educational qualification, and years of clinical experience.

## **V. Conclusion**

Majority of studied nurses have moderate level of knowledge relate to legal and ethical responsibilities and low level of application in both. The highest mean score related to legal knowledge followed by application of ethical knowledge. There were statistical significant relations between knowledge of legal and ethical responsibilities with level of education. Also there were statistical significant relation between ethical knowledge gender and experience. Every health care professional should have adequate knowledge in the legal and ethical aspects to provide comprehensive care to the patients. Thus, they can safeguard themselves and patients from the legal and ethical consequences.

## **VI. Recommendations**

- Based on the fore mentioned study results; we recommend hospital management to conduct educational programs about legal and ethical knowledge with focusing on application of it in nursing practice as general and in psychiatric departments as a special.
- It is preferred to appointment nurses with B.Sc. to work in psychiatric departments.
- It is inevitable to nursing supervisors to observe staff nurses on duty; how they deal with patients and the way they apply ethical and legal knowledge.
- Nurse educators/nursing schools and colleges must give additional teaching on ethical and legal aspects in patient care to the student nurses.
- Authorized nursing personnel at Assiut university Hospitals will be increase nurses awareness on ethical and legal knowledge issues by the subject experts.
- The booklet of "Legal and Ethical principles in psychiatric units" should be disseminated for novel nurses in psychiatric department.

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**Table (1):** Percentages distribution of studied nurses according to their personal characteristics (N= 110).

Variable	No.(n=110)	%
Age group:		
20-30 years	20	18.2
30-40 years	62	56.4
> 40 years	28	25.5
Mean ± SD(Range)	38.45±.25(20-51)	
Gender:		
Male	46	41.8
Female	64	58.2
Marital Status:		
Single	14	12.7
Married	94	85.5
Widowed	2	1.8
Education level:		
Nursing secondary school Diploma	94	85.5
Bachelor of Nursing	8	7.3
Nursing Technical Institute	8	7.3
Mean ± SD (Range)	19.64±7.42(2-31)	
Years of experience in psychiatric nursing		
< 5	22	20.0
5 – 10	50	45.5
> 10	38	34.5
Mean ± SD(Range)	18.56±8(2-31)	
Training courses		
Yes	78	70.9
No	32	29.1
-If yes		
University Administrative	36	32.7
Directorate of Mental Health Assiut	2	1.8
Education Development Center	12	10.9
Mental health hospital	28	25.5

**Table (2):** Range, means and standard deviations of legal and ethical Knowledge, and its application.

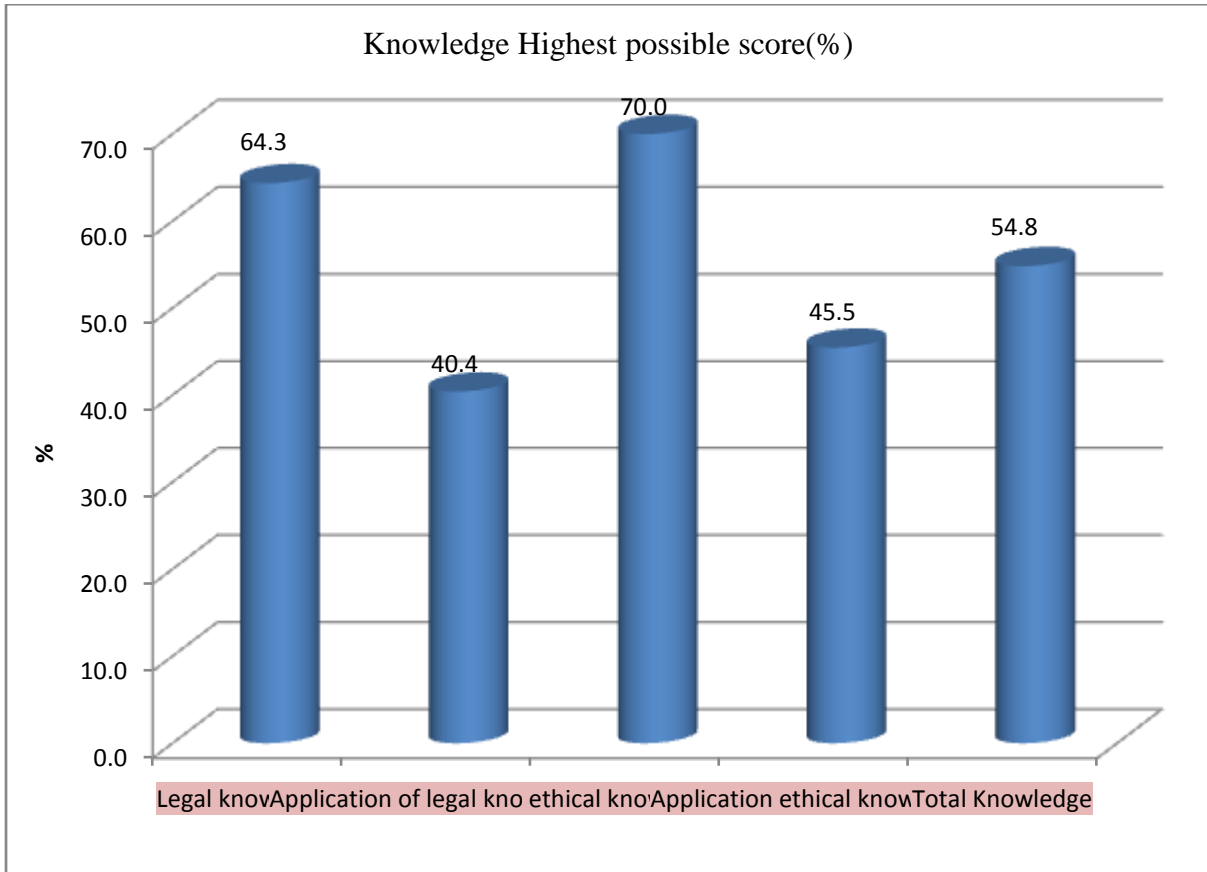
Variables	Score	Range	Mean $\pm$ SD
Legal knowledge	23	9-17	14.8 $\pm$ 1.78
Application of legal knowledge	9	0-4	3.64 $\pm$ 0.75
Ethical knowledge	4	1-3	2.8 $\pm$ 0.48
Application ethical knowledge	16	1-8	7.27 $\pm$ 1.17
Total Knowledge	52	12-32	28.51 $\pm$ 3.33

**Table (3):** The relationship between legal and ethical knowledge, its applications, and total knowledge with personal characteristics of studied nurses (N=110)

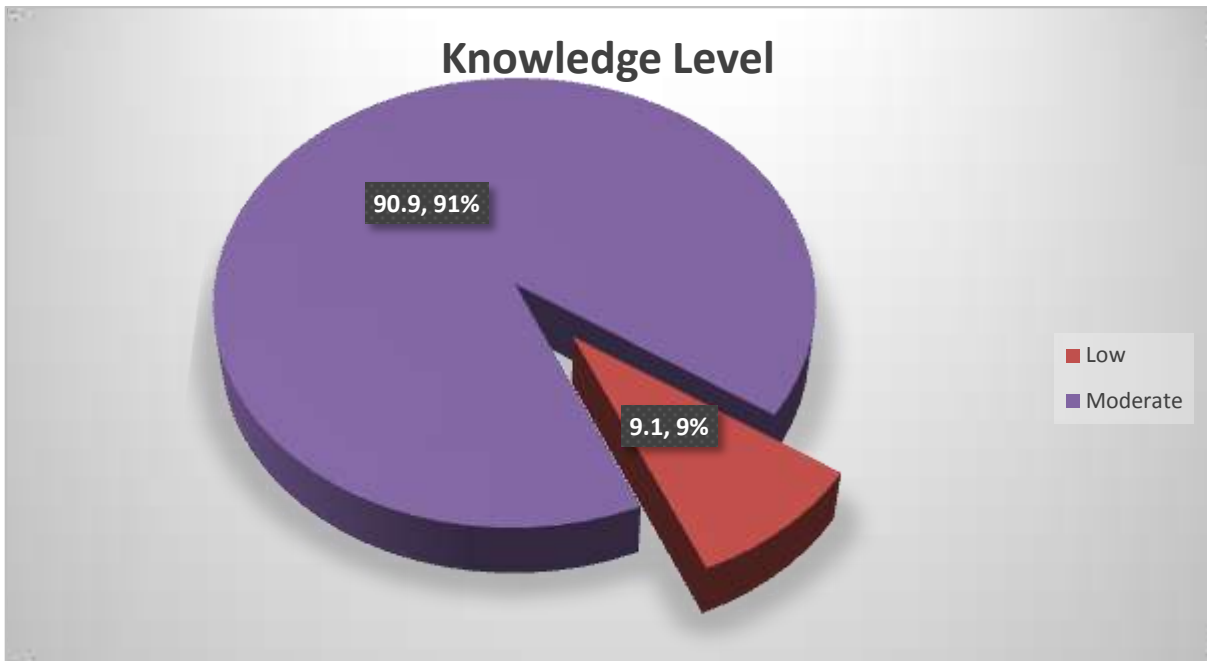
Personal characteristics	Legal knowledge	Application of legal knowledge	Ethical knowledge	Application ethical knowledge	Total Knowledge
	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD
<b>Age group</b>					
20-30 years	15.4 $\pm$ 0.82	3.7 $\pm$ 0.66	2.8 $\pm$ 0.41	7.8 $\pm$ 0.62	29.7 $\pm$ 2
30-40 years	14.74 $\pm$ 1.85	3.65 $\pm$ 0.6	2.74 $\pm$ 0.57	7.06 $\pm$ 0.85	28.19 $\pm$ 2.76
more than 40 years	14.5 $\pm$ 2.06	3.57 $\pm$ 1.07	2.93 $\pm$ 0.26	7.36 $\pm$ 1.83	28.36 $\pm$ 4.83
P. value	0.210	0.837	0.241	0.045*	0.206
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	14.87 $\pm$ 1.69	3.65 $\pm$ 0.87	2.96 $\pm$ 0.21	7.39 $\pm$ 1.48	28.87 $\pm$ 3.9
Female	14.75 $\pm$ 1.85	3.63 $\pm$ 0.65	2.69 $\pm$ 0.59	7.19 $\pm$ 0.89	28.25 $\pm$ 2.85
P. value	0.730	0.852	0.004**	0.371	0.338
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Single	15.43 $\pm$ 0.76	3.57 $\pm$ 0.76	2.86 $\pm$ 0.36	7.86 $\pm$ 0.36	29.71 $\pm$ 1.82
Married	14.7 $\pm$ 1.89	3.64 $\pm$ 0.76	2.79 $\pm$ 0.51	7.17 $\pm$ 1.23	28.3 $\pm$ 3.49
Widowed	15 $\pm$ 0	4 $\pm$ 0	3 $\pm$ 0	8 $\pm$ 0	30 $\pm$ 0
P. value	0.361	0.754	0.744	0.082	0.273
<b>Education level</b>					
Secondary school diploma nursing	15.06 $\pm$ 1.53	3.64 $\pm$ 0.79	2.89 $\pm$ 0.31	7.36 $\pm$ 1.2	28.96 $\pm$ 3.1
Bachelor degree in Nursing	13.25 $\pm$ 3.15	3.25 $\pm$ 0.46	2 $\pm$ 1.07	7.5 $\pm$ 0.53	26 $\pm$ 4.96
Technical Institute of Nursing	13.25 $\pm$ 1.39	4 $\pm$ 0	2.5 $\pm$ 0.53	6 $\pm$ 0	25.75 $\pm$ 1.16
P. value	0.001**	0.136	<0.001**	0.005**	0.002**
<b>Years of experience psychiatric nursing:</b>					
Less than 10 years	15.27 $\pm$ 0.98	3.73 $\pm$ 0.63	2.82 $\pm$ 0.39	7.55 $\pm$ 0.8	29.36 $\pm$ 2.11
from 10-20 years	14.76 $\pm$ 1.84	3.68 $\pm$ 0.62	2.68 $\pm$ 0.62	7.2 $\pm$ 0.86	28.32 $\pm$ 2.92
More than 20 years	14.58 $\pm$ 2.04	3.53 $\pm$ 0.95	2.95 $\pm$ 0.23	7.21 $\pm$ 1.63	28.26 $\pm$ 4.27
P. value	0.342	0.524	0.035*	0.479	0.406
<b>Training courses</b>					
Yes	14.72 $\pm$ 1.78	3.67 $\pm$ 0.57	2.79 $\pm$ 0.52	7.23 $\pm$ 0.84	28.41 $\pm$ 2.58
No	15 $\pm$ 1.8	3.56 $\pm$ 1.08	2.81 $\pm$ 0.4	7.38 $\pm$ 1.76	28.75 $\pm$ 4.73
P. value	0.453	0.511	0.863	0.560	0.629

Independent T- test(\*\*statistically significant difference at P. value <0.01)

Anova-test (\*\*statistically significant difference at P. value <0.01)



**Figure 1:** Percentages of legal and ethical knowledge, and its application of studied nurses.



**Figure 2:** Levels of ethical and legal knowledge of studied nurses (n=110)

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