

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IN THE CLASSROOM
AMONG NURSING STUDENTS:
PREVALENCE AND PRACTICES**

Research Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this descriptive, correlational study was to examine the prevalence and current methods of academic dishonesty in the classroom among nursing students in Southeastern Wisconsin. The relationships among demographic variables of college GPA, age, gender, marital status, and hours of employment and the incidence of unethical behaviors also were explored.

Framework: The theoretical framework guiding this study was based on moral development models by Kohlberg (1981, 1984) and Gilligan (1982).

Design and Methods: A demographic data form and a modified version of the Hilbert Unethical Behavior Scale (Hilbert, 1985) were administered to 255 generic senior BSN and final semester ADN students enrolled in five randomly selected NLNAC and/or CCNE accredited nursing programs in Southeastern Wisconsin.

Results: Findings revealed 74.1% of participants admitted to participating in unethical behaviors. The most common dishonest behaviors were working together on individual assignments (44.3%), plagiarizing without citing properly (42%), adding unused bibliography items (30.2%), and getting exam questions early (25.9%). Nursing students utilized the internet, email, chat rooms, cell phones, and graphic calculators as methods to accomplish these unethical behaviors. Male gender, younger and older ages, and lower GPAs correlated significantly with unethical behaviors. Students who were single and living together, along with those who worked part- and full-time also had significant differences with increased individual and total behaviors. In addition, reasons for engaging in unethical behaviors were revealed.

Implications: The incidence of unethical classroom behaviors was alarming. The impact may go well beyond the academic setting. The apparent acceptance of unethical behaviors has tremendous implications for the ethical fabric of the nursing profession, with potential long-term negative effects on nursing practice, education, theory, and research. As these implications were examined, recommendations for nurse educators are suggested.