

# The Effect of Sex Difference and Gender Role Identity on Moral Courage: A Study among Clinical Nurses

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## Abstract

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**Introduction:** Until now, empirical research, where the main focus is moral courage, is scarce. **Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the effect of gender role identity and sex difference on the moral courage of nurses related to ethical issues of daily nursing practices. **Method:** We applied the survey analytic research design in this. This research was conducted in 5 hospitals in Makassar City using multistage random sampling. The number of samples is 405 nurses. **Result:** The results found that from the perspective of sex difference and gender role identity, there is a significant difference in the context of nurses' moral courage, such as the mean value of male moral courage is higher than female ( $p= 0.013$ ) ( $p<0.05$ ). Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen the moral courage of nurses so that they can face various ethical issues of daily nursing practices. **Recommendation:** Further studies should assess a larger representative sample with self-report instruments to determine the actual impact of gender differences and their significance on nurses' moral courage when facing ethical issues in daily nursing practice.

**Keywords:** Moral Courage, Nurses, Gender role identity, Sex.



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## INTRODUCTION

Empirical research, where the main focus is moral courage, is extremely rare (1)(2). Some research on moral courage is still focused on the authenticity of the concept of moral courage (1). In nursing, moral courage is described as the capacity of nurses to overcome fear in dealing with problems that are in direct conflict with the core professional values of nursing (3). Besides that, Moral courage is the ability to overcome the fear of shame and humiliation in admitting wrongdoing, defying immoral or unwise orders, preventing injustice, and resisting evil conformity (4). Strengthening moral courage is one of the effective ways to overcome moral distress that causes a lot of physical and emotional disturbance to a person, which affects their satisfaction (5) and is often neglected in the nursing profession (6).

In nursing practice, nurses tend to face a lot of ethical decision-making (7). A previous study explained that situations could cause moral pressure for nurses, namely when nurses make many ethical decisions. They cannot act under their ethical principles(8). Furthermore, if this condition occurs continuously and is not resolved, it will cause physical and emotional fatigue (burnout) (8).

In the context of moral courage, nurses' experiences and suffering related to moral distress have encouraged the nursing profession to seek effective ways to reduce the impact of moral distress (9)(10). Moral courage has been introduced as an effective way to overcome moral distress (11)(12). Moral courage is a highly valued element of human morality, and today moral courage is recognized as a part of nursing care (13)(14). A serious and focused approach to the concept of moral courage has begun to emerge as a result of the renewed interest in the virtue ethics of nursing (13)(15).

Overall, the term "gender" is used to refer to "the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that are culturally associated with a person's biological gender" (14). In contrast, the term "sex" refers to a person's biological status (16). A previous study confirmed that

research on gender differences in empathy had revealed mixed findings (17). While experimental and neuropsychological measures do not show consistent sex effects, self-report data consistently show greater compassion in women. However, the available results come mainly from separate populations with relatively small samples, which may increase the effect size and hinder comparability between the two empirical corpora.

In clinical practice, inefficient health services and basic measurement errors can be caused by implicit social factors related to the health care providers' characteristics (18). Important service provider characteristics are gender and the role of authority. Gender differences and role identity are essential to study in clinical settings. This is based on several reasons, including experimental studies showing that women with men show greater overall empathic reactions to behavioral distress (19). In contrast, males tend to be more critical in their evaluations of others, potentially attenuating neuro cortical empathizing responses and reporting (18). Therefore, research on gender roles in a moral context is essential.

## OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to investigate the effect of gender role identity and sex differences on the moral courage of nurses related to ethical issues of daily nursing practices.

## METHOD

### Design

A survey analytical research with a cross-sectional study approach was applied in this study to identify and analyze a phenomenon of moral courage among clinical nurses at the hospital.

### Sample and sampling technique

This research was conducted in 5 hospitals in Makassar City. In the study, researchers used multistage random sampling. The first stage was selecting hospitals using simple cluster sampling to establish several hospitals. The second stage, determining the number of samples for each

location using proportional random sampling and sampling (nurses) in each hospital, is done using simple side random for each room. The number of samples in this study was 405 nurses. Percentage of samples proportion for each hospital was adjusted to the total population of each hospital. The larger the population of nurses in the hospital, the larger the percentage of samples proportions. The inclusion criteria are Nurses who are willing to be respondents, and Exclusion Criteria are Nurses who drop out during the research process, Nurse on duty studying, Nurse on leave.

### Instruments for data collection

The instrument used in this study was the Professional Moral Courage Questionnaire (20). The validity test results obtained a value of 0.414-0.895 (r-table=0.3494). It is concluded that all question items are valid. The value of Cronbach 'alpha> 0.60 is 0.756. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires directly to nurses. The instrument consists of 15 questions using a Likert scale in the frequency level, namely 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always.

### Data analysis

Data analysis used the Mann-Whitney test. This test is used to compare the mean of 2 population groups, and the distribution of the data is not normally distributed.

### Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were safeguarded since this project was authorized by the Ethics Committee of the Hasanuddin University through Act No. 1205/UN4.6.4.5.31/PP36.

## RESULTS

### Characteristic respondent

Based on table 1, from the age characteristics, the young adult category is 166 people (39.7%), and the adult category is 252 people (60.3%). For gender characteristics, most respondents were women, as many as 351 people or 84.4% of the total respondents. Based on the

characteristics of the level of education, the majority of respondents have level nursing profession as many as 225 people (53.8%).

**Table 1. The characteristic distribution of respondent**

Characteristic	Category	F	%
Age	Young Adult	166	39.7
	Adult	252	60.3
	Elderly	0	
Sex	Male	67	16.1
	Female	351	83.9
Level of education	Diploma 3 of Nursing	113	27
	Bachelor of Nursing	77	18.4
	Nurse Profession	225	53.8
	Master of Nursing	3	0.7
Length of Employment	Length of Employment before	103	24.6
	New length of employment	315	75.4
Occupation	Charge Nurse	41	9.8
	Leader nurse	36	8.6
	Nurse	341	81.6

Based on 2, it is known that most men and women have the category of moral courage at a moderate level; 46 men and 271 women. From the data, it can also be seen that six women have a low level of moral courage.

**Table 2. Category Moral Courage**

Variable	Characteristic Gender	Category	F	%
Moral Courage	Female	High	71	16.9
		Moderate	271	64.8
		Low	9	2.2
	Male	High	21	5
		Moderate	46	11.1
		Low	0	0

Based on table 3, it is known from the perspective of sex difference and gender role identity. There are significant differences in the context of nurses' moral courage, which can be seen from the p-value variable, namely 0.013 ( $p > 0.05$ ), where males have a higher average moral courage value than women.

**Table 3. Comparison of Moral Courage of nurses**

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	p
Moral Courage	Female	84.75	± 13.42	0.013
	Male	86.35	± 16.07	

## DISCUSSION

This study shows that there are significant differences based on the gender identity of nurses in the practice of moral courage. This is contrary to previously available evidence, showing no significant difference between sexes in the experimental EPT paradigm (17). Statistically, it can be seen that the average achievement of the moral courage value of male nurses is higher than that of female nurses.

This finding is exciting and can be considered in assessing gender identity and gender differences in the context of moral courage in the scope of daily nursing practice. There is an influence between moral courage on ethical decision-making by a person. If a person has the will to speak up and do what is right in the face of forces that would make a person act in another way, there will be an intention on that person to report a problem.

In this study, the average difference in moral courage values between women and men is different. Previous findings show that these results indicate that sex differences in moral courage are not ubiquitous; instead, they emerge mainly under specific conditions. Evidence from neuroimaging studies has been demonstrated at a neuroanatomical level. The process of empathy involves a broad network. It included the insula, anterior cingulate cortex, appendage motor area, amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex, and temporoparietal junction (19, 21-25). Empathy can encourage someone to be more courageous in rejecting things contrary to ethical rules. So that nurse who has high empathy are also assumed to have high moral courage.

A previous study demonstrated a significant effect of moral judgment on understanding agent intentions and ranking

discomfort for intentional harm (17). Similarly, other studies revealed a significant impact of moral judgment on empathic attention, but the effect was very small. Further studies are needed to understand the relationship between moral judgment and different cognitive and affective empathy measures.

Psychological research has shown that moral courage is influenced by cognitive information processing in self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and interpersonal and group norms (26). Moreover, social forces shape decisions to act morally boldly due to subjective and group norms and social identity (27). Moral courage has been recommended to overcome the problem of moral distress (28), which has been recognized as a significant problem with negative consequences indicating problem areas that need ways to overcome them (26). Moral courage is a virtue that requires ethical consideration and action and is an essential element in the general moral competence of nurses (29).

Although moral courage is essential for nurses in dealing with various ethical situations, in its application, various obstacles are encountered that hinder the practice of moral courage in daily nursing practice. A previous study outlined several reasons that hinder the moral courage of nurses, including the fear of being fired, the fear of being demoted, being reprimanded in a certain way, and worrying about being intimidated by co-workers (30).

Another study explained that every nurse is often less sensitive about the importance of morals when carrying out nursing care for various reasons (31). Moral difficulties often occur in nursing, which can lead to paradoxes in nursing and affect high-quality nursing services. Most of the ethical and moral nursing research over the last

decade shows that nurses are not fully prepared to provide the best nursing care or have not contributed appropriately to their patients (32).

Therefore, maintaining and strengthening the moral courage of nurses is an important thing that must be realized and carried out both by nurses themselves and in the realm of leadership to solve various ethical problems faced in daily nursing practice.

## CONCLUSION

There is a significant difference between moral courage from sex difference and gender role identity. Moral courage is very influential on ethical decision-making by nurses in the practice of daily nursing services.

## RECOMMENDATION

One policy solution to this potential gender disparity in clinical practice could be to increase the moral courage of nurses, both male, and female, through a climate of leadership, decision making, and motivation. Further studies should assess a larger representative sample with self-report instruments to determine the actual impact of gender differences and their significance on nurses' moral courage when facing ethical issues in daily nursing practice.

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