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Recommended Citation

Khamis, Asmaa, "Assessment of Attitude of Postgraduate Pediatric Nursing Students' toward the Academic Integrity" (2019). *Nursing*. 37.

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Assessment of Attitude of Postgraduate Pediatric Nursing Students' toward the Academic Integrity

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Abstract

The present study was a descriptive study that aimed to assess the attitude of postgraduate pediatric nursing students toward the academic integrity in their nursing learning experience. A convenient sample that consisted of 100 postgraduate pediatric nursing students enrolled in academic year (2016-2017) in both two semesters, 80 students enrolled in master program while 20 students enrolled in PhD program. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire sheet, in addition to Likert - type scale to assess the attitude of the studied students about academic integrity. The results of this study revealed that more than three quarters of the studied students were female, while less than half aged from 25 ≤ 30 years old. There was a statistical significance difference between PhD and master students as regards to their total attitude regarding academic integrity. It was concluded that the majority of the studied students had positive attitude toward the academic integrity meanwhile, there were many factors as peer pressure, limited time for study, difficulty of learning materials and large amount of study materials that affect academic integrity environment. It was recommended that providing further induction for postgraduate research students (PhD program) related to academic integrity policies and procedures.

Key words: academic integrity, attitude, postgraduate studies, pediatric nursing

Introduction

Academic integrity is the heart of the academic life. It is the real basis for success in our mission and vision as a nursing educators. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) defines academic integrity as "A commitment even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect and Responsibility". It is recognized as enumerating behaviors that are prohibited rather than by identifying values to be promoted (**International Center of Academic Integrity (ICAI), 2012**).

Building an environment that support academic integrity is really a hard job especially in teaching and

learning experience. This environment should to be an educative rather than punitive approach. Therefore, setting the basic and foundation of academic integrity rules, policies and procedures is the responsibility of academic staff, students as well as community stakeholders whom have a vital role in implementing these policies and procedures (**Woith et al., 2012, P. 254**).

Promoting academic integrity atmosphere in nursing education is essential; it requires equilibrium and integration between educational mission and vision supported with policies and procedures that can be effectively understood and efficiently implemented. The effective academic integrity should develop and explain transparent procedures and systems

for adjudicating and integrity violations (Fishman, 2012).

Although there is a wide-based investigation and a world-wide direction regarding academic integrity especially in higher education, insufficient information and literature could be found regarding research done in nursing especially on postgraduate students especially in Egypt and the Middle East (Gilmore *et al.*, 2010).

Nursing students today are the nursing leaders for tomorrow that supposed to give high, efficient, qualified and trustful nursing care to children and their families. Nurses are expected to deal with ethical and moral issues or dilemmas that they may be faced within their practice (Ajzen, 2011). The nursing profession's standards of practice, codes of ethics and conduct required nurses graduate to be honest in the provision of care, correct documentation and record keeping as students behavior and attitude change according to institution and cultural influence (Threat, 2011 & American Nurse Association, 2012).

Significance of the study:

Academic integrity is wide-ranging and also encountered in the nursing education environment. This phenomenon is of concern to the nursing because of the proven positive correlation between unethical academic practices and future unethical professional behavior. From the researcher's point of view, nursing students become professional nurse practitioners bound to ethical codes of practice, and the health care consumers must be able to trust them to practice their profession with integrity at all times.

Academic dishonesty in nursing education - with consequent questioning of the nurse's honesty and professional integrity - causes great concern in the nursing profession. Therefore, there is a need to study and investigate the attitude of the post graduate pediatric nursing students regarding academic integrity in their academic studies.

Aim of the Study: -

This study is aimed to assess the attitude of postgraduate pediatric nursing students' toward academic integrity in their nursing learning experience.

Subjects and Methods

Technical design

The technical design includes research design, setting, subject and tools of data collection.

Research design

A descriptive exploratory research design was utilized in the study.

Research setting

This study was carried out in Pediatric Nursing department at Faculty of Nursing Aim Shams University

Research subjects

A non-probability convenient sample, composed of 100 post graduate pediatric nursing students enrolled in the academic year (2016-2017), in both first and second semesters, 80 students enrolled in master program while there was 20 students enrolled in PhD program.

Tools and technique of data collection

Data required for the current study were collected using the following tools:

(I) Pre-designed Questionnaire Sheet:

The researcher designed the questionnaire sheet in English Language after reviewing the related literatures. The tool were in form of Yes and No questions, multiple-

choice questions and Likert- type scale questions and it was consists of two parts as the following:

Part (I) it included data about the characteristics of postgraduate students as gender, age, qualifications, registration level of postgraduate studies, current work filed and home language.

Part (II) it included data to assess students' knowledge regarding academic integrity specifically related to referencing, cheating and plagiarism.

Scoring system for the knowledge questions:

The right answers were scored one grade, and those wrong were scored zero. The total score of knowledge questions are 39 grade (100 %). The questions classified into three parts; **1st part related to the students' knowledge about referencing** (three questions (Yes or No) 3 grades), **2nd part related to knowledge about plagiarism** (1 question yes or no and 3 questions (MCQ) 4 grads) and the **3rd part was relate to the cheating behaviors** among the studied students (13 questions in form of Likert scale ranged from Never (4 grades), rarely (3 grades), sometimes (2 grades) and usually (1 grade). These scores were summed –up and converted into a percent score. Accordingly their knowledge was categories into:

- Satisfactory level of knowledge: if the percent score was 60 % or more.
- Unsatisfactory level of knowledge: if the percent score was less than 60%.

(II) **Likert – type scale adopted from Theart and Smit, (2012):** to assess the attitude

of the studied students about academic integrity in their nursing learning experience.

The scale is consisted of 19 statements categorized into four parts;

- The first part was to assess the studied students' attitude about cheating (6 statements),
- The second part was to assess students' attitude about the effect of peer pressure on academic integrity (4 statements),
- The third part was to assess students' attitude about awareness of cheating behaviors done by others (4 statements)
- The fourth part was to assess the students' opinion regarding factors that engage them in cheating behavior.

Scoring system for the attitude questions:

Each statement was ranged from strongly disagree (4 grades), disagree (3 grades), agree (2 grades), strongly agree (1 grade). The total score of attitude questions are 44 grade (100 %).

These scores were summed –up and converted into a percent score. Their attitude was classified into:

- **Positive attitude** if the percent score was 60 % or more
- **Negative attitude** if the percent score was less than 60%.

Validity and Reliability:-

Tools of data collection used in the study are standardized tool with no modifications or translation.

Ethical Consideration

An official approval was carried out from The Scientific Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Nursing, Aim Shams University before conducting of the study. A written consent was obtained from the studied students. The researcher explained the aim of the study to the studied students who accepted to be enrolled in the study. Each student was informed that he\she has the right to drop out / withdraw at any

time without any restrictions. Anonymity, confidentiality, beneficence, research purpose only, respect and justice all of these ethical consideration principles taking into consideration while conducting this research study.

Statistical design

The collected data were organized, revised, tabulated, and analyzed. Computer using statistical package of social science (SPSS 20) did statistical analysis. The suitable statistical tests were used to determine whether there was a significant statistical difference between study variables or not.

Results

Table 1:- Characteristics of the studied students. (N=100)

| Item | N | % |
|--|-----------|------|
| Gender | | |
| • Male | 18 | 18 % |
| • Female | 82 | 82 % |
| Age | | |
| • Less than 25 years | 6 | 6 % |
| • From 25 to less than 30 years old | 45 | 45 % |
| • From 30 to less than 35 years old | 34 | 34 % |
| • Equal and More than 35 years old | 15 | 15 % |
| $\bar{x} \pm SD$ 30 \pm 5.34 | | |
| Registered level of post graduate studies | | |
| • Master MSc | 80 | 80 % |
| • Ph. D | 20 | 20 % |
| Previous educational qualifications | | |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc). | 74 | 74 % |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc) + Diploma. | 26 | 26 % |

Regarding the characteristics of the studied students **table (1)** showed that more than three quarters (82 %) of the studies students were female, while less than half (45 %) were aged from 25 - <

30 years old and 80% of them registered in Master program. Also, almost three quarters (74 %) of the studied students have bachelor degree only.

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of studied students according their knowledge related to academic integrity. (N=100)

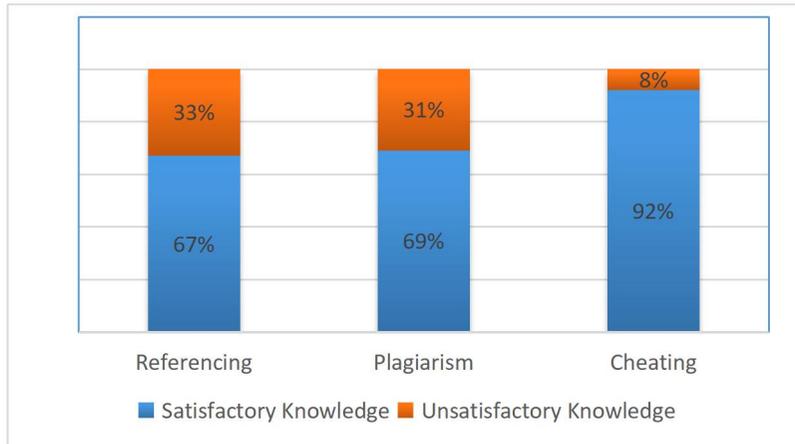


Figure (1): It was clarified from this figure that the majority (92%) of the studied students had satisfactory knowledge related to cheating. However, more than two thirds (67 % and 69%) of them had satisfactory knowledge related to referencing and plagiarism respectively.

Figure 2: percentage distribution of studied students according their total knowledge related to academic integrity. (N=100)

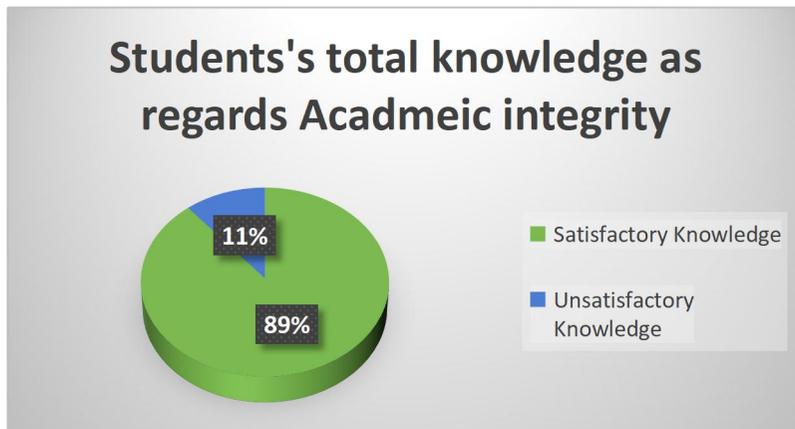
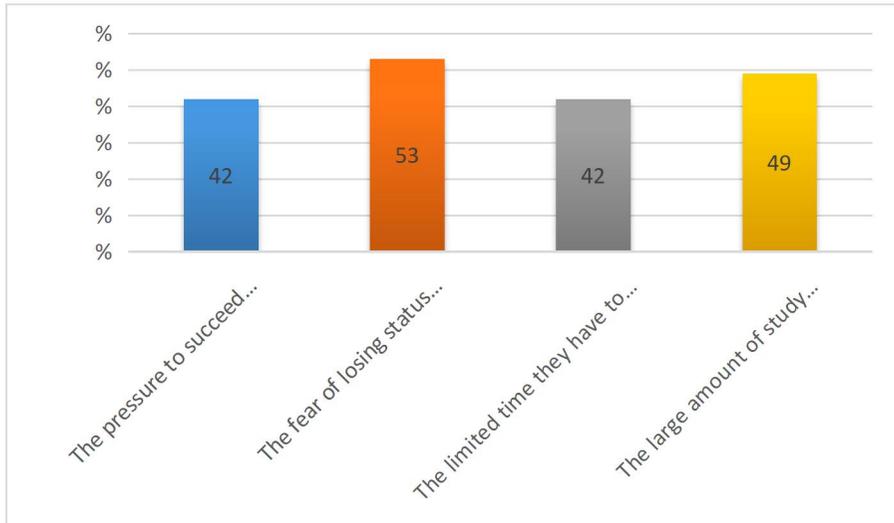


Figure (2): It was obvious from this figure that the majority (89 %) of the studied students had satisfactory knowledge related to academic integrity.

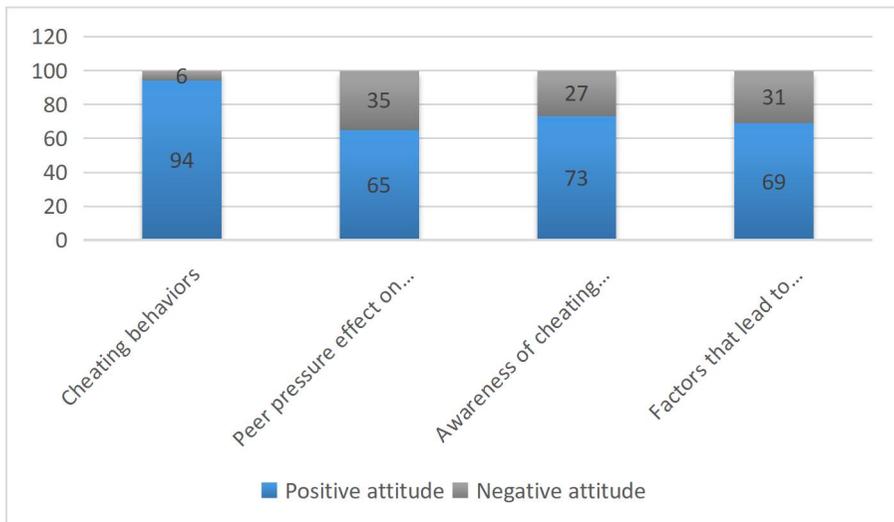
Figure 3: Percentage distribution of studied students factors that lead to engage in cheating behaviors. (N = 100)



Concerning postgraduate students factors that lead them engage in cheating behaviors (figure 3) revealed that the 1st and major factor was the fear of losing status amongst peers that mentioned by 53 % Of the studied students while almost half of them (49%) indicated that large

amount of study materials in post graduate studies that have to master considered a leading factor. Also, results revealed that 42% of the studied students referee cheating behaviors due to pressure to success academically and the limited time that they have to study respectively.

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of studied students according their attitude related to academic integrity. (N=100)



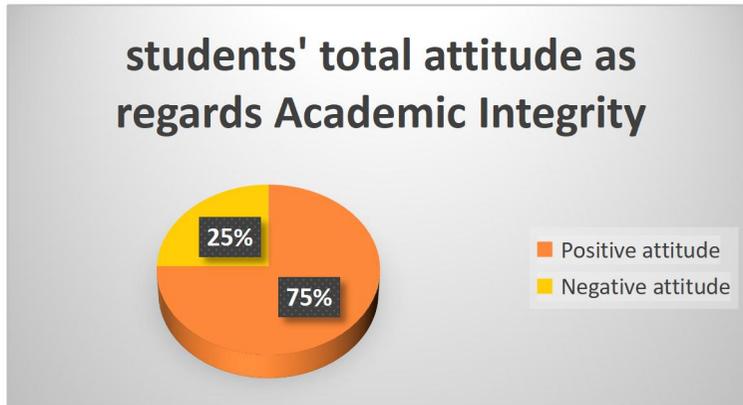
Related to postgraduate students attitude related to academic integrity figure (4) presented that, the majority (94%) of the studies students have positive attitude

related to disagreeing on cheating behaviors. Also, near to two thirds (65%) of them found that peer pressure effect on their attitude toward academic integrity.

In addition 73% & 69% of the studied students had positive attitude regarding their awareness of cheating behaviors by

others and factors that led to cheating behaviors respectively.

Figure 5: percentage distribution of studied students according their total attitude related to academic integrity. (N=100)



As regards the students' total attitude related to academic integrity **figure (5)** presented that, almost three quarters

(75%) of the studies students have positive attitude related to academic integrity.

Table 2: Relationship between the characteristics of studied students and their total knowledge regarding academic integrity. (N=100)

| Item | Total Knowledge | | X ² | P- Value |
|--|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|
| | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | | |
| | % | % | | |
| Gender | | | 0.665 | 0.415 |
| • Male | 17 | 1 | | |
| • Female | 72 | 10 | | |
| Age | | | 32.00 | 04*0. |
| • Less than 25 years | 2 | 4 | | |
| • From 25 to less than 30 years old | 40 | 4 | | |
| • From 30 to less than 35 years old | 29 | 3 | | |
| • Equal and More than 35 years old | 18 | 0 | | |
| Registered level of post graduate studies | | | 3.090 | .070 |
| • Master MSc | 69 | 11 | | |
| • Ph. D | 20 | 0 | | |
| Previous educational qualification | | | 0.01 | 0.919 |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc). | 66 | 8 | | |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc) + Diploma. | 23 | 3 | | |

* $P \leq 0.05$, there is statistically difference.

Table (2) clarified the relationship between the characteristics of studied

students and their total knowledge regarding academic integrity; there was a statistical significance difference ($P \leq$

0.05) between the age of the studied students and their total level of knowledge regarding academic integrity.

Table 3: Relationship between the characteristics of studied students and their total attitude. (N= 100)

| Item | Total attitude | | X ² | P-Value |
|--|----------------|----------|----------------|---------------|
| | Positive | Negative | | |
| | % | % | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| • Male | 12 | 6 | 0.813 | 0.367 |
| • Female | 63 | 19 | | |
| Age | | | 27.12 | 0.132 |
| • Less than 25 years | 6 | 0 | | |
| • From 25 to less than 30 years old | 36 | 8 | | |
| • From 30 to less than 35 years old | 24 | 8 | | |
| • Equal and More than 35 years old | 9 | 9 | | |
| Registered level of post graduate studies | | | 75.00 | 0.000* |
| • Master MSc | 75 | 5 | | |
| • Ph. D | 0 | 20 | | |
| Previous educational qualification | | | 0.624 | 0.430 |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc). | 57 | 17 | | |
| • Bachelor degree (BSc) + Diploma. | 18 | 8 | | |

* $P \leq 0.001$, there is statistically difference.

Table (3) clarified the characteristics of studied students and their total attitude; there was a highly statistical significance difference ($P \leq 0.001$) between the level

of registration for postgraduate studies among the studied students and their total attitude regarding academic integrity.

Table 4: Correlation between total knowledge and total attitude related to academic integrity among the studied postgraduate pediatric nursing students. (N= 100)

| Item | Total Attitude |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Total Knowledge | Pearson Correlation |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is obvious in **table 4** that, there was statistical significance difference ($r = -.203$, $p < .05$). Between the total knowledge of the studied students and

Discussion

Academic integrity is a very pivotal item in teaching, learning and research process. It appears an easy topic to address. It is very complex, multifarious and interdisciplinary approach to present or to follow (**Jiang et al., 2013**).

Developing academic integrity is crucial in nursing profession where nurses' action is a matter of saving life. Postgraduate education programs aim to create new ideas, develop and improve student's skills through identifying different research methods. In addition, to produce highly skilled graduates with high standards of honesty and professional ethics (**Olutola, 2016**).

The present study aimed to assess the attitude of postgraduate pediatric nursing students toward academic integrity in their nursing learning experience. Regarding the characteristics of the studied students (table, 1) the finding of the present study showed that more than three quarters of them were females and almost the great majority of them aged more than 25 years old, this finding was in agreement with **Mahmud and Bretag (2013)** who carried out a study entitled "Post Graduate Research Students and Academic Integrity" and found that the majority of post graduate students were females and aged 25 years and more. In addition, this findings was congruent with **Kececi et al., (2011)** how conducted a study named "Academic Dishonesty among Nursing Students" to investigate the academic dishonesty among nursing students and found that the majority of them were female. From the researcher's point of view, this significant result was related to the huge number of female applicants who enrolled in nursing faculties over the country, which enabled

their total attitude regarding academic integrity, which indicated that when knowledge related to academic integrity increased, positive attitude will grow up. them to enroll in postgraduate programs than male applicants.

The present study revealed that the majority of postgraduate students enrolled in Master program rather than PhD program. This finding may be due to the exceeded amount of time and effort that the PhD degree exerted compared to master degree.

Concerning to (figure, 1) which clarified the percentage distribution of studied students according their knowledge related to academic integrity; it was found that the majority of the studied students had satisfactory level of knowledge related to cheating. However, more than two thirds of them had satisfactory level of knowledge related to referencing and plagiarism respectively. This classification and categorization of academic integrity was similar to **Theart & Smit (2012)** who conducted a study called "The status of academic integrity amongst nursing students at a nursing education institution in the Western Cape " which investigate the status of academic integrity according to the three main categories cheating, plagiarism and referencing. The researcher view those three main categories as principles of building strong academic integrity environment because those are the most common practices of academic dishonesty.

As regards to (figure, 2) that describe the percentage of total knowledge regards to academic integrity, it was obvious that the majority of the studied students had satisfactory knowledge related to academic integrity. The researcher believed that this might be due to the preliminary semester in master program, which include an overview about basics of Scientific Research Ethics.

Concerning to the students' response regarding factors lead to cheating behaviors (figure, 3) showed that, almost quarter of studied students agreed that cheating behavior is influenced by the academic pressure to succeed in postgraduate studies. In addition, the table revealed that almost half of them agreed that the fear of losing status amongst peers is a cause of cheating behaviors. Moreover, the limited time they have to study in addition large amount of study materials they have to master was agreed on influencing factors of cheating behaviors. This finding was in disagreement from the study of **Theart and Smit (2012)** which rank the factors that lead to cheating behaviors begins with pressure to succeed academically by the great majority of studied students, which indicated that it is a major factor influencing cheating behaviors. The 2nd factor was limited time which is 74 % of respondents. The 3rd factor was fear for losing status amongst peers 71 %. Other Study done by **Ehrich et al., (2016)** titled as "A comparison of Chinese and Australian university students' attitudes towards plagiarism" mentioned That more than one-fifth of Chinese students indicated that plagiarism is justified under conditions of heavy workloads Moreover, **Park et al., (2013)** focused in this point which revealed that 30% of the studied sample reported 'a lack of time' and 'little motivation for an assignment' as one of the major reasons for assignment-cheating.

As related to postgraduate students attitude related to academic integrity (figure, 4) it was presented that, the majority of the studies students have positive attitude related to disagreeing on cheating behaviors. Almost two thirds of them found that peer pressure effect on their attitude toward academic integrity. In addition, almost two thirds of their response regarding awareness of cheating behaviors of others and factors that led to cheating behaviors respectively. The

researcher believes that all of these components formulate studied students attitude and their perspective of academic integrity.

Concerning to postgraduate students' total attitude related to academic integrity (figure, 5) presented that, almost three quarters of the studies students have positive attitude related to academic integrity. This interesting finding in the researcher's point of view was expected due to the higher percentage of postgraduate pediatric nursing student's knowledge regarding academic integrity.

Regarding the relation between characteristics of studied students (gender, age, and qualification of postgraduate pediatric nursing students) and their total knowledge of academic integrity (table, 2) there was a statistical significance difference between the age of postgraduate students and their total level of knowledge regarding academic integrity. While, almost half of the students aged from 25 to less than 30 years old had satisfactory knowledge than others. In the researcher point of view, this surprising result was related to engaging students aged from 25 to less than 30 years more with internet sources and easily accessible references, which enable them for writing, paraphrasing and following all principles of academic integrity.

Relating to the relation between the characteristics of studied students (gender, age, and qualification of postgraduate pediatric nursing students) and their total attitude toward academic integrity (table ,3) the present study demonstrated that there was statistical significance difference $P \leq 0.001$ between the level of registration for postgraduate studies among the studied students and their total attitude regarding academic integrity. As master program students had positive attitude than PhD students. Researcher view this result as it might be assumed because those students

(PHD students) are often left to fend for themselves as they have graduated with at least 2 grads (bachelor and master) grades and they didn't require further induction on academic integrity policies and procedures.

In other hands the present study demonstrated that no statistically significance between other characteristics of studied students and their total attitude toward cheating behaviors, peer pressure effect, awareness of cheating behaviors and factors that lead to cheating behaviors. Several studies was done supported these point as **Blankenship (2000)** research that titled as " Relation of general deviance to academic dishonesty" supported the present study finding that no significance difference between male and female in cheating behaviors. In the other hand, this result was not in accordance with **Theart and Smit (2012)** which concluded that males have more positive attitude toward cheating behaviors than females. In addition, this finding was in disagreement with **Aslam & Nazir (2014)** who conducted a study titled as "The Impact of Personality Traits on Academic Dishonesty among Pakistan Students" which revealed that there was a significance difference between personality traits and cheating behaviors.

As regard to (table, 4) the correlation between total knowledge and total attitude related to academic integrity among the studied postgraduate pediatric nursing students, there was highly statistical significance difference ($r = -.203, p < .05$) between the total knowledge of the studied students and their total attitude regarding academic integrity. In the researcher's point of view, this result indicated that when knowledge related to academic integrity increased, positive attitude would grow up. According to **Creswell (2012)** online book it was emphasized that when

studding relationship between knowledge and attitude this relationship is incremental when knowledge increasing, attitude tend to be more positive.

Limitation of the study

Limitation of this study has similar limitations with other studies in this field: generalization of the study findings is limited because of convenient sampling methods. Hesitancy by participants to disclose the truth in fear of repercussions or in attempts to make oneself look good contributes to response bias. In an attempt to minimize the response bias limitation, the researcher emphasized to participants that the purpose of the study was for exploration of the topic, and understanding the nature of academic dishonesty among postgraduate nursing students as a whole, was the focus of the study.

Conclusion

Based on the current study the majority of the studied students were have a positive attitude toward academic integrity. The status of academic integrity among postgraduate pediatric nursing students surrounding with many factors that have an effect on it as peer pressure, limited time for study, pressure to success, difficulty of learning materials and large amount of study materials. These factors should take into consideration to foster academic integrity environment.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Provide further induction for postgraduate research students particularly doctoral degree (PhD program) students' knowledge related to academic integrity policies and procedures.
2. Integrating the concept of academic integrity into postgraduate pediatric nursing curricula.

3. Establish a responsible and lawful system that manage incidents of academic integrity breaches.
4. Academic integrity policies and procedures must be formulated in clear, exact definitions that spell out acceptable and unacceptable academic integrity behaviors.
5. Special attention should be given to PhD students about plagiarism and referencing techniques.
6. Create awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding academic integrity policies and procedures that consider a pre requisite for development of necessary skills to be a safe nurse practitioner.
7. Establish and create role model for academic integrity in pediatric nursing department to be follow by faculty departments.
8. Academic integrity statements should be positioned in course syllabus in a standardized position across the nursing program.

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