

TCU Moral Development of Undergraduate Pre-Health Students TCU

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Background

- Graduate students in healthcare, e.g., medical students, often face time constraints that limit their engagement with ethics studies.
- This investigation focuses on a unique undergraduate Pre-Health program that includes ethics and professional development courses, exploring the possibility that such early instruction could advance moral development in undergraduates and potentially "immunize" them against moral regression in their future medical training.

Research Questions

1. Does moral reasoning of pre-health students differ from education students and university controls at matriculation?
2. What is the comparative level of moral development, across all four years of study (cross-sectional design), among pre-health students, education students and university controls?
3. How does participation in four specific pre-health courses influence the moral development of pre-health students over the course of their study?

Instrument

- **Defining Issues Test (DIT-2)** (Rest, 1999)
- 5 short stories, each presenting a moral dilemma.
- Participants decide on a course of action and then rate 12 items based on their decision making relevance.
- Responses are scored to identify the predominance of 3 schemas: (P,MN, and PI).
- N2 score reflects strong preference for P-reasoning over PI concerns.



Participants

- Pre-health students enrolled in any of four courses
- College of Education students all undergraduate years
- Other undergraduates from same institution (university controls)
- Ages 18-24

Interventions

- The interventions consists of four specialized courses: Introduction to Pre-Health, Bioethics, Professional Development, and Cultural Awareness in Healthcare Capstone, each incorporating variable ethics content delivered by a trained moral educator.



Measurement & Design

- The Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2) will be administered via Qualtrics survey to pre-health students (pre- and post-course) and once per semester to education and other undergraduate students (university controls), assessing changes in moral development.
- **Longitudinal Component:** Evaluates changes in moral development among pre-health students.
- **Cross-sectional Component:** Expands to include education students and university controls.



Statistical Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics**
- **Longitudinal Analysis within Pre-Health Group**
- Pair T-Tests To compare pre- and post-course DIT-2 scores and assess moral development over time.
- **Cross-Sectional Analysis**
- One-Way ANOVA: To compare DIT-2 scores across academic years within each group.
- ANCOVA: To compare DIT-2 scores between Pre-Health, Education, and University controls, adjusting for gender, age, and experiential variables

Limitations

- Quasi-experimental
- Generalizability: sample size & diversity
- No true control group.
- Unrecognized confounding effects

Summary

- This study aims to address the knowledge gap regarding the influence of a specialized pre-health curriculum on students' moral development, comparing outcomes with education students and a general undergraduate cohort.
- This research could guide pre-health educators in designing curricula that enhance ethical reasoning, potentially preparing students more effectively for the moral complexities of healthcare professions.

Moral Reasoning Framework

Neo-Kohlbergian Approach

- **3 Developmental Schemas** (Rest, 1999)
- **Personal Interest (PI)**
- Considers personal gains or losses for individuals directly involved in the moral dilemma.
- **Maintaining Norms (MN)**
- Reflects adherence to societal norms, emphasizing a collective viewpoint and consistent application of laws.
- Represents the respect for authority and the desire for social order.
- **Postconventional (P)**
- Involves applying moral ideals equitably across society, valuing moral principles above specific norms.
- Indicates advanced moral reasoning that transcends specific cultural or legal codes in favor of overarching ethical considerations.

References

