

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Comparison of the Concept of Patient Dignity in Islamic and Nursing Texts****Authors**

Abdoul- Hosein Khosropanah

Professor of Islamic philosophy. Member of faculty of Islamic research institute for culture and thought.  
[khosropanahdezfuli@gmail.com](mailto:khosropanahdezfuli@gmail.com)

**Corresponding Author:**

Akram sadat Sadat hoseini

Associated professor of Tehran university of Medical Sciences, School of Nursing and Midwifery and member of Quran and Hadith research Institute of Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

[ashoseini@tums.ac.ir](mailto:ashoseini@tums.ac.ir), Iran IR.

Tehran. Nousrat street. School of Nursing and midwifery.0989122094828. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8818-2384>

Nahid Dehghan nayeri.

Professor of Tehran university of Medical Sciences, School of Nursing and Midwifery.

[nahid.nayeri@gmail.com](mailto:nahid.nayeri@gmail.com)

Mohammad dowlaty.

Associated professor of University of Quran and Hadith sciences. [muhammaddowlati@gmail.com](mailto:muhammaddowlati@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**

Human dignity is regarded as the presupposition of respect for patients. Dignity is associated with different meanings in cultures. In this research was compared dignity in Islamic and nursing texts. Research was done in three stage; definition of dignity based on Islamic texts, definition of dignity based on nursing text, comparison between two definitions. finding showed; both Islam and nursing have *Inherent dignity* but the origin of dignity differs; in Islam was considered it because human beings were created by God, in nursing human beings are worthy because they are characterized by authority. In Islam *Adventitious dignity* is other kind of dignity that achieved as the result of obedience to God. Nursing texts consider such criteria as societies' cultures, customs, age, sex, job and beliefs in defining other types of dignity. But, both perspectives take similar approaches that ethics must be based on Inherent dignity. Both perspectives argue that delving into other types of dignity in providing nursing services can create moral problems. Ultimately, nursing texts emphasize the practical aspects whereas the Islamic perspective is more abstract. Thus, we need to describe principles of performance based on the Islamic view to enhance nursing practice as per Islamic culture

**Keywords:** Islam. Dignity. Nursing. Ethics

## Introduction

In nursing, human dignity is considered as the primary concept in explaining ethical principles, professional commitment, and the patients' rights charter<sup>1-3</sup>. The concepts such as human rights and, consequently, attention to nursing ethics are based on the belief in human dignity<sup>4-9</sup>. Although different cultures, nations, and societies are in agreement with regard to the concept of human dignity, the origin and types of dignity can be considered from different points of view<sup>10,11</sup>. Introducing the view of other societies and cultures in nursing knowledge allows nurses to be familiar with the definition of dignity in different cultures and, thereby, plan the provision of nursing intervention based on the corresponding ethical principles to the recipients, in addition to developing and strengthening this knowledge<sup>12,13</sup>. Familiarity with the definitions of basic concepts in ethics also helps nurses to explain the patients' rights charter and enhance their professional commitment in accordance with the Islamic culture<sup>14-16</sup>. Moreover, according to the new nursing theories, excellence in the process of providing care is one of the goals of providing nursing care<sup>17-19</sup>. Knowing the origin and definition of human dignity helps Muslim nurses to provide care as per the Islamic views and definition of dignity in this respect, to achieve excellence and self-esteem in this regard<sup>20</sup>. The studies of dignity in Islamic countries can be classified into several categories. The studies by Manokian (2014)<sup>21</sup> Shahriari (2013)<sup>22</sup>, and others<sup>2,21-27</sup> explored the concept of dignity from the Muslim perspective, but the purpose of Islam is not clearly stated; so, we need to express the Islamic views in this regard. In some studies, the respect for and dignity of patients have been reported according to the Islamic culture<sup>2,21-27</sup>. However, attention has not been paid to defining dignity in Islam and its differences in different cultures. In general, it

can be said that the studies on the definition of dignity in Muslim countries have often been based on the hermeneutic approach and study of the Muslims' experiences<sup>2,21-23,25-27</sup>. No studies have been done so far to define dignity according to the Islamic texts and compare it with the definitions of dignity in the nursing texts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to define *dignity* as per the Islamic texts and compare it with the common definition in nursing texts.

## Methods

### Stage one: Definition of dignity based on Islamic texts

At this stage of research, dignity was defined based on Islamic texts by conducting a review of the literature. Literature searches were done without considering time, language, and location limitations. The search was limited to the Shiite versions of Islamic texts, and the search keyword was *dignity* (Keramat). The search was first performed in the Qur'an which led to the detection of four verses (verse 4 of Tin, 14 of Mo'menoon, 70 of Asra, and 13 of Hojorat)<sup>28,29</sup>. Then, the Qur'anic interpretation related to these verses followed by all the related interpretations of dignity were searched in the Noor interpretation software (NOORSOFT) version 3, which provided 4488 related texts in the initial search. Finally, 115 texts were selected and checked. In the next step, *dignity* was searched utilizing Noor Jami' al-Ahadith software version 3.5, and 1834 hadiths were found in the first phase; 35 texts were selected. In addition to a research team that included a Master's student in Hadith sciences and medical ethics, a professor of Islamic sciences, and an associate professor of Hadith and Qur'anic sciences. An Islamic science professor also participated in the materials selection process to verify the accuracy of the selected texts. In the next

stage, the search for the texts and studies on the definition of dignity in Islamic texts were carried out without any restrictions. The search databases include NOORMAG, SID, and IRANDOC. In the first step, 654 articles and books were found, all indexed on the ISC site and with enough scientific credence. Finally, 26 papers were selected based on the relevance of the definition of dignity. Again, a comment by one of the Islamic science professors was used in addition to that of the research team to confirm the validity of the searched and selected studies. Finally, the concepts were extracted from the summarization.

### **Stage two: Definition of dignity based on nursing texts**

This stage consisted of two steps. In the first step, we searched physical the libraries in Iran. A total of 37 books on nursing ethics were found, of which three were about dignity. There were practically no independent books regarding patient respect, but there were some materials on patients' rights, confidentiality, and privacy in the books on the foundations of nursing care. As such, two books were selected for this stage. Relevance to dignity and respect for patients was the main criterion for selecting the books. In the second step, we made use of databases such as Ovid, Springer, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using search terms like *Dignity-Nursing-Patient* and different combinations of these words, focusing on articles from the year 1990 onwards and in English and Persian languages. A total of 7932 articles were found, of which, 135 were identified as relevant, and eventually, 20 papers were selected. Again, relevance to dignity was the main criterion for selecting the articles. The accuracy of this stage was assessed by an associate professor of nursing and a professor of nursing who were in the research team, and another nursing professor also participated in

the materials selection to verify the accuracy of the selected texts.

### **Stage three: Comparison between the Islamic and nursing texts**

This stage involved two steps: firstly, we determined the superficial similarities and differences between the two approaches in defining the notion of dignity, including terminology, types of dignity, and the origin of dignity. Secondly, we determined the fundamental similarities and differences between the two approaches in defining the notion of dignity, including the position of the intellect in Kant's ethics and the Islamic texts, the tool for recognizing moral action, the purpose of the moral action, and the connection with human dignity<sup>30</sup>.

### **Limitation of the study:**

The limitation of this study was the limited access to the nursing books about dignity. Researchers could only access the books which were in the Iranian library or were open access e-books.

This research has been registered in the Quran and Hadith Science University, and because the study did not involve human subjects, no code of ethics was applicable.

### **Results**

In Islam, two kinds of human dignity are described: A) Inherent dignity—God created human beings and gave them better form and function than other beings. Therefore, the inherent dignity of human beings is seen in their capabilities, which are not possessed by other beings, and the superiority of human beings is due to their intellectual abilities. The most important verses in Quran that represent this kind of dignity are as follows: Surah Tin (verse 4), "Indeed, We created the human with the fairest stature"; Surah Al Mu'minun (verse 14), "Then We created of

the drop, a clot (of congealed blood), and We created the clot into a bite-size tissue, then We created the bite-size tissue into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it into another creation. Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators!” and most importantly, Surah Al Isra (verse 70), “We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on both land and sea. We have provided them with good things and greatly preferred them above much of Our creation”. B) Adventitious dignity—this refers to human beings achieving perfection through good deeds. This kind of dignity derives from the endeavors and values of human beings manifested as a result of obedience to God. This kind of dignity determines the superiority of one person over another. Surah Hujurat (verse 13) contains the most important verse that highlights this kind of dignity. “People, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you might know one another. The noblest of you before Allah is the most righteous of you. Allah is the Knower, the Aware.”<sup>10,15,23,28,29,31-37</sup>

### Definition of dignity in nursing texts

The definitions of dignity in the nursing texts are all derived from Kantian ethics<sup>38-40</sup>. In all the theories, human beings have certain abilities and, as a result, are more valuable than other beings and deserve the notion of dignity<sup>38,39,41</sup>. However, in some nursing texts, various other forms of dignity are described<sup>4,7,8,11,25,42</sup>. For example, there is a kind of dignity achieved by individuals due to their exceptional capabilities and high social status<sup>4,7,8,11,25,42</sup>. It is unanimously stated in all texts that, in nursing, this kind of dignity should not be the basis for respecting patients<sup>9,43-48</sup>. On the other hand, some nursing texts have divided the concept of dignity into intrinsic (i.e., what one feels for himself/herself) and extrinsic dignity (i.e., what others create in him/her)<sup>27,40,41,44,49-58</sup>.

In fact, nursing theories emphasize maintaining, upgrading, improving, and treating these two kinds of dignity. Therefore, patient respect should include aspects that directly affect their intrinsic and extrinsic dignity<sup>27,40,41,44,49-58</sup>.

In this regard, maintaining privacy, self-control, independence, and secrecy can be considered to promote intrinsic dignity<sup>45-47</sup>. In contrast, communication with the patient, patient participation in the decision-making process, respecting the patient, paying due attention to their mental and psychological problems, establishing good communication with the patient's family, and providing a favorable caring environment promote extrinsic dignity<sup>22,41,49,50,52-59</sup>.

Paying more attention to those aspects that promote extrinsic dignity in children and those who do not have sufficient decision-making power is difficult but important, because these individuals may not have a proper understanding of intrinsic dignity, or their understanding may be evolving<sup>38-40,60</sup>. Of course, paying attention to culture, social values, age, and sexual factors is also effective in defining dignity<sup>11,25,26,31,43</sup>. Most theories state that more studies are required to identify all the aspects of dignity and patient respect. Patient respect in the nursing texts is the basis for nursing ethics instructions.

### Discussion

The discussion is based on the comparison of Islamic definitions and nursing views.<sup>61</sup>

### Comparison of dignity in Islamic and nursing texts

1) Superficial similarities and differences between the two approaches in defining the notion of dignity

- Terminology

As described in the results, Islamic texts argue that the concept of dignity includes a kind of inherent respect and value that dignifies individuals<sup>15,33</sup>. Regarding the terminology used in the nursing texts, it appears that the Latin word *Dignitas* refers to merit and the difference between merit and other common things<sup>39,40,62</sup>. It seems that these two definitions differ only regarding the focus on worthiness and merit. As per the Islamic texts, human value is regarded as a distinguishable characteristic; paying attention to one's valuable nature results in competency and merit. In nursing theories, although worthiness and excellence are not neglected, the semantic emphasis is on the merit earned due to the presupposed value. Therefore, dignity means (in Islamic texts) that human beings are inherently valuable, but nursing texts argue that human beings are valuable due to their acquired worthiness. Worthiness is synonymous with price, cost, honor, magnitude, fitness, and merit; merit is synonymous with suitability, competence, and deservingness<sup>22,26,53,55,63</sup>. Although the apparent difference between the two phenomena seems to be an ordinal one (i.e., human beings are valuable and, as a result, deserve certain characteristics), the lexical definition of this concept indicates that the nursing texts tend to be more inclined to express the quality and manner of providing a solution, but Islamic texts are inclined to express the nature and terminology of concepts. Therefore, regarding terminology, there is a difference in the approaches to the term. Islamic texts take an exponential and theoretical approach, but nursing texts have a more practical viewpoint in this regard.

- The origin of dignity

In Islamic texts, based on numerous verses, the origin of human dignity is divided into several categories: A) the special nature of human creation, B) human duties in the world, and C) human abilities<sup>15,32</sup>. From the

point of view of the nursing texts, which is a product of Kantian philosophy, wisdom constitutes human dignity and, consequently, human beings are given authority and autonomy<sup>31,38-40,60,62</sup>. Accordingly, these features dignify human beings. From the Islamic perspective, human beings were created to be of high quality, and they have certain duties and responsibilities. Thus, human beings are valuable and are accordingly imbued with dignity. Conversely, nursing texts state that human beings are imbued with wisdom, reason, and discretion and, for this reason, deserve dignity. The latter perspective does not stem from the idea of God's creation but goes back directly to the individual himself/herself.

- Categories of dignity

Regarding Islamic texts, it can be seen that dignity is of two types: inherent and adventitious. All Islamic texts refer to inherent dignity, and it is the basis of morality<sup>15,32,33</sup>. However, in explaining the categories of dignity, they resort to such categorizations as intrinsic vs. extrinsic, interactive vs. internal, and so on. These kinds of categorization are likely the result of human communication and reactions that affect human dignity. In such categorizations, it seems that a practical approach has been clearly adopted and, as a result, these categorizations have been created only to serve nurses. In addition, it seems that there is practically no concept called virtue (*Taqwa*)<sup>23,60</sup>, in these categorizations, as a criterion of adventitious dignity, and this concept has no worth at all. Therefore, both views expressly support intrinsic dignity. Nursing texts do not accept this type of dignity. Instead, they believe in a kind of dignity that is reflected as a result of the influence of external factors such as society, culture, and beliefs.

## 2) Fundamental similarities and differences between the two approaches in defining the notion of dignity

- The position of wisdom in nursing ethics and Islamic texts

In Kant's view, wisdom is the criterion for human worthiness<sup>38,39,41,53,64-66</sup>. He emphasized the concept of practical wisdom<sup>38,39</sup>. He believed that the wisdom that leads to free will is a valuable entity<sup>31,40,60,62</sup>. Conversely, Islamic texts believe in three aspects of wisdom: theoretical, practical, and divine<sup>31,33</sup>. Thus, science and what is inherently created within human beings are the very characteristics of all human beings. Islamic texts emphasize theoretical wisdom, but Kant focused on practical wisdom in defining the notion of dignity<sup>31,33</sup>. In Islamic texts, the criterion of theoretical wisdom is considered as one of the reasons for the inherent dignity of human beings. However, in Kant's view, practical wisdom and human autonomy are the basis of human dignity. Kant did not enter into the realm of Godliness and religiosity and did not consider it in the domain of human dignity. To the contrary, Islamic texts put much more emphasis on human dignity based on Godliness and God's creation. In nursing texts, it is argued that societies dignify human beings. This varies from one society to another and is measured in accordance with the level of human perception and understanding in any given society. Conversely, Islamic texts state that virtue is the criterion of adventitious dignity, which is measured through a divine criterion<sup>31,33</sup>. Although this parameter is embedded with external elements and manifestations, the criterion for judging the extent of this kind of dignity is not limited to the individual themselves or societies and, in fact, only God knows the level of dignity. This change in the criterion of adventitious dignity from the mundane (within the limits of human authority) to the divine realm (outside the

limits of human authority and only in the power of God) virtually excludes it from the scope of decision making in providing nursing care. The issue of not taking adventitious and extrinsic dignity into account in the provision of nursing care is considered in all nursing texts. In fact, the nursing texts consider inherent dignity as the only criterion of human dignity, and all human beings have one level of inherent dignity. Similarly, Islamic texts also reaffirm humans as having inherent dignity and argue that all human beings deserve to be dignified regardless of the extent of their adventitious dignity. Interestingly, in nursing theories, the reason for not using the criterion of adventitious dignity in providing nursing care is that giving a special value or rank to inherent dignity based on adventitious dignity leads to many moral and social challenges and thus should not be considered as a criterion for providing nursing care. On the contrary, Islamic texts state that human beings cannot practically measure the degree and extent of adventitious dignity based on virtue. This is due to the fact that this judgment is not in the realm and capabilities of human beings, and its criterion in Islam is virtue, which is a spiritual matter.

- The tool for recognizing moral action

Kant believed that wisdom is the criterion of morality; that is, if wisdom says that something is a moral act, then it is a moral act. On the other hand, Kant saw *goodwill* as a necessary and sufficient condition for the explanation of moral action. Kant's emphasis on individual conscience as an inner court and the judgment accompanying human beings and its sanctity may have established the natural and genetic independence of human beings<sup>31,33,38-40,60,62</sup>. Therefore, conscience and rationality are the criteria of moral action in Kant's view. Conversely, Islamic texts state that theoretical and practical wisdom jointly constitute the

foundations of any given moral action. From this point of view, moral action is based on divine orders. Of course, this does not mean that divine orders are the opposite of wisdom, but rather that because they are rational, God endorses them<sup>10,15,31-34</sup>. Therefore, the criterion of moral action does not reside within the individual but manifests through obedience to the commands of God. These two contrasting attitudes highlight the criterion of the worthiness of moral action. As such, the Islamic criterion is in harmony with divine orders and nature, but the nursing-driven criterion is in harmony with rational perceptions based on the conscience of a human being himself/herself or other human beings.

- The purpose of moral action

Although both perspectives believe in accepting the greatness and abilities of human beings, they can further develop their talents and capabilities to move towards perfection and completeness. In the perspective of Islamic texts, the origin of this movement and the achievement of transcendence is derived from a divine-rational basis, but this origin is rational-human from the perspective of nursing texts. Nursing theories consider that ethical observance and ethical action can contribute to the perfection of human beings. Therefore, if a person performs an ethical action based on his/her conscience, he/she will achieve excellence and will lead others in this way. However, Islamic texts say that an ethical action derived from divine commands, accompanied by reflection and thoughtfulness, is considered a useful way to achieve excellence. Accordingly, gaining adventitious dignity, which is based on virtue, is also a criterion for human transcendence.

- The connection between human dignity and patient respect

Islamic texts reaffirm human dignity as having inherent dignity and argue that all human beings deserve to be dignified due to this inherent dignity, and patients deserve to be honored and respected due to their specific conditions. Regarding nursing texts, in some cases, there is no distinction between dignity and patient respect, which goes back to the practical view of these texts<sup>5,7-9,22,42,45,47,52,57,59</sup>. However, the general view is that human beings are inherently respectable, and they must be dignified, and patients deserve to be honored and respected due to their specific conditions and needs during a period of illness. Therefore, apart from the worthiness and value of human beings, both approaches argue that human beings must be respected because they are honorable. In both approaches, the origin and reason for respecting patients is their inherent dignity, and adventitious dignity is not the basis for respect towards patients. Although some texts differ on the priorities for patient respect regarding age, sex, type of disease, and patients' needs, they have identified the principles of patient respect on the basis of the inherent dignity of human beings.

### Conclusion

To summarize, it seems that human dignity is accepted in both Islamic and nursing texts. However, the origin of dignity differs between the two. Since human beings were created by God, they are considered valuable in Islam. Conversely, in the Kantian view, human beings are worthy of respect because they are characterized by wisdom and authority. In the provision of nursing services, both perspectives allow for the consideration of inherent dignity. Besides, both perspectives argue that delving into other types of dignity in providing nursing services can create challenges and moral problems. Nursing texts consider such criteria as cultures, customs, and beliefs of the society in defining other types of dignity.

The Islamic perspective says that virtue and good deeds are the main criteria for defining other types of dignity. Ultimately, it appears that nursing texts emphasize the functional and practical aspects whereas the Islamic perspective is more abstract and intellectual. Thus, we need to explain and describe the duties and principles of performance based on the Islamic view to enhance nursing practice as per Islamic culture. In general, it seems that observing patient respect is an obvious and accepted principle in providing nursing care to patients, and it seems that there is no controversy on this issue from either perspective. The important point is that authorities should pay attention to the spiritual factors and effects of disease to increase human dignity and excellence. Therefore, if one puts spiritual factors in the domain of profitability through moral principles, they will constitute an important part of patient respect in Muslim societies. Therefore, based on the points mentioned in relation to respecting patients in Islamic

texts, it seems that taking care of a person who is in trouble is not only a duty, but also a kind of reward with a spiritual aspect. In the Islamic perspective, a nurse will find that he/she cares for a human being who has a privileged position in the eyes of God due to his/her disease. In this perspective, the patient and the disease are not the proposed method of life, but the person in this position is an individual who is in a particular position intended to balance his/her nature and achieve greater adventitious dignity. Besides, patients are not only in dire need of help, but they also deserve to receive the best services.

**Conflict of interests:**

There is no conflict of interest.

**Research ethics:**

This research is based on literature review and does not have human or animal participants but in literature review researchers seek to protect the rights of authors.



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