

Occupational Therapy Students' Perspectives of Ethics in Two Countries: South Africa and the United States of America

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Introduction: Worldwide, health professions students including occupational therapy (OT), typically undergo ethics training. Training strives to facilitate students' critical thinking, objective analysis and clinical reasoning skills to produce impartial, unbiased decisions in different contexts with diverse populations.

Objectives/Aims: 1) Describe how OT students perceive a contextually complex ethical dilemma 2) Compare ethical perceptions of OT students trained in different cultural contexts.

Method: This descriptive qualitative study sought to describe the students' perceptions of ethical conduct through participation in an online international ethics module. Purposeful sampling was undertaken. Data was collected from students' analyses of a case study engaging them in an ethical reasoning process to determine societal obligation to prevent harm. Data was analyzed thematically resulting in the following themes: 1) Steps of Ethical Reasoning; 2) Cross Cultural Issues; 3) Application of Theory; 4) Intersection of Law and Ethics. The study conformed to all the ethics guidelines set by the relevant committees of the University of the Western Cape and the University of Missouri.

Results: Students experienced different cross-cultural issues which influenced their ethical judgments. While many meta-ethical constructs were consistent amongst groups, there continues to be variability regarding ethical duties associated with OT practice.

Conclusion: There is a need amongst educators to identify, share and discuss similarities and differences in how OT practitioners address ethical issues, using the ethical reasoning process as a guide. The international OT community needs to further the profession's meta-ethical discourse in order to guide clinical application within a diverse and globally connected workforce.