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The Relationship Between Knowledge of Medical Malpractice and Professionalism Among Medical Students (A Study of the Class of 2022 at the Faculty of Medicine, Sultan Agung Islamic University, Semarang)

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Abstract

Knowledge of medical malpractice is believed to play a significant role in shaping medical students' attitudes toward professionalism as future physicians; however, research on the relationship between the two at the academic level remains limited. This study aims to determine the relationship between knowledge of medical malpractice and medical students' attitudes toward professionalism. An analytical observational study with a cross-sectional design was conducted on 144 medical students from the Faculty of Medicine at Sultan Agung Islamic University, class of 2022, using total sampling. Data were collected via questionnaires on knowledge of medical malpractice and professional attitudes, then analyzed using Spearman's rank correlation test. All respondents (100%) had a high level of knowledge regarding medical malpractice and a good level of professionalism. The correlation test results showed a significant relationship ($r_s = 0.288$; $p = 0.000$) with a positive direction; however, the strength of the correlation was classified as weak. There is a significant relationship between knowledge of medical malpractice and professionalism among medical students, although knowledge is not the sole determining factor..

Keywords : Knowledge of Medical Malpractice, Professionalism, Medical Students, Medical Ethics, Medical Education.



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INTRODUCTION

Medical students occupy a strategic position as future physicians who are expected to master scientific knowledge, clinical competence, ethical judgment, and professional conduct throughout their undergraduate and clinical training. Professional identity is therefore not established solely through the acquisition of biomedical knowledge but also through the internalization of legal awareness, ethical responsibility, and accountability in medical practice. Contemporary medical education increasingly recognizes that professionalism should be cultivated from the earliest stages of undergraduate training because professional attitudes developed during medical school strongly influence future clinical behavior and patient safety. Readiness to demonstrate professional conduct is inseparable from students' ability to understand the legal and ethical boundaries of medical practice, including the concept of medical malpractice, which functions as an important preventive framework for responsible clinical decision-making (Soemantri, 2023; Dubbail et al., 2019). Educational preparedness in health professions also requires systematic integration of professional values throughout the curriculum so that graduates are equipped not only with technical competence but also with collaborative and ethical capabilities expected in contemporary healthcare systems (Damayanti and Bachtiar, 2020).

Medical malpractice has become one of the most critical medico-legal issues because it reflects the intersection between healthcare delivery, professional accountability, and patients' legal rights. Legal scholarship distinguishes malpractice from unavoidable medical risk by emphasizing the existence of negligence, deviation from professional standards, or failure to fulfill legal obligations during healthcare delivery (Kolib, 2020). Similar perspectives explain that malpractice encompasses criminal, civil, and administrative consequences depending on the nature of the violation and the resulting harm suffered by patients (Handoyo, 2020; Puspitasari, 2018). Healthcare disputes arising from malpractice allegations also generate profound consequences for both patients and healthcare providers, affecting public trust, institutional credibility, and professional integrity, thereby reinforcing

the necessity of strengthening medico-legal literacy among future physicians (Handayani, 2020; Babys, Dioniki and Yusuf, 2024).

National evidence demonstrates that concerns regarding medical malpractice remain highly relevant in Indonesia. Records from the Indonesian Medical Association previously documented an increasing number of lawsuits against physicians, rising from 10 cases in 2015 to 30 cases in 2016, 38 cases in 2017, and 33 cases in 2018, illustrating persistent legal challenges confronting the medical profession. More recent data from the Professional Discipline Council of the Indonesian Health Council reported 55 disciplinary complaints adjudicated during 2025, including a documented case originating from Semarang under Decision No. 56/P/MDP/XII/2024, indicating that professional disciplinary violations continue to occur despite regulatory strengthening (Konsil Kesehatan Indonesia, 2025). These findings indicate that improvements in legal regulation alone are insufficient without parallel enhancement of ethical awareness and professionalism among future healthcare professionals. Medical disputes arising from malpractice allegations further illustrate the complex relationship between professional competence, legal compliance, and patient protection within modern healthcare systems (Koto and Asmadi, 2021).

Professionalism represents a multidimensional construct encompassing ethical integrity, accountability, competence, altruism, commitment to continuous learning, respect for patients, and adherence to professional standards throughout healthcare practice. Contemporary conceptualizations describe professionalism as a commitment to prioritizing patient welfare while maintaining public trust through ethical conduct and responsible clinical practice (Lecours, Baril and Drolet, 2021). Within the Indonesian context, professional behavior similarly requires healthcare providers to exercise ethical responsibility, clinical competence, and accountability in every therapeutic interaction, thereby ensuring that professional authority is exercised within accepted ethical and legal boundaries (Gosal, Manampiring and Waha, 2022). Strong professionalism consequently functions as an essential safeguard against ethical violations, disciplinary sanctions, and malpractice litigation.

Knowledge regarding medical malpractice constitutes one of the cognitive foundations supporting professional attitudes because adequate understanding enables future physicians to recognize legal risks, appreciate ethical obligations, and perform clinical responsibilities with greater caution. Medical education therefore should not merely transmit theoretical legal principles but also cultivate reflective ethical reasoning capable of guiding professional behavior throughout future clinical practice. Evidence from health professional education demonstrates that stronger knowledge of professional ethical codes is associated with more positive attitudes toward responsible clinical practice, emphasizing the educational importance of integrating legal and ethical instruction within undergraduate curricula (Putra and Listyaningrum, 2024). Complementary evidence further suggests that patient satisfaction is strongly influenced by physicians' professionalism, highlighting the practical significance of cultivating professional values before students enter clinical environments (Putri Irmada and Surya Wanasida, 2022).

Educational institutions have consequently assumed an increasingly important responsibility in strengthening students' understanding of medical ethics, professionalism, and malpractice prevention. Character formation in medical education extends beyond cognitive achievement by integrating moral values, ethical reasoning, and professional identity into structured learning experiences. Programs addressing biomedical ethics, medical law, professionalism, and humanitarian values provide opportunities for students to internalize professional responsibilities before assuming direct responsibility for patient care (Permatananda, 2022). Nevertheless, undergraduate medical education is simultaneously accompanied by considerable academic demands capable of influencing students' learning experiences, emphasizing the importance of continuously evaluating educational outcomes related to professionalism among medical students (Marlina Wati, Dewinta Farma and Susanti, 2025).

Existing literature has predominantly investigated professionalism from psychological, educational, or clinical perspectives, whereas empirical evidence specifically examining the association between knowledge of medical malpractice and professionalism among undergraduate medical students remains limited. Previous findings indicate that psychological well-being contributes positively to students' professionalism (Nurkholisah, Meidianawaty and Fachrudin, 2025), while medico-legal literature primarily discusses malpractice from legal accountability perspectives rather than educational preparedness (Ponda et al., 2024). This imbalance reveals an important research gap because understanding malpractice may represent a distinct educational determinant influencing professional

attitudes during undergraduate medical training. Investigating this relationship is particularly relevant among students who have completed formal instruction in biomedical ethics and medical law but have not yet entered professional clinical practice, allowing evaluation of professionalism development at the academic stage before clinical exposure.

Students of the Faculty of Medicine, Sultan Agung Islamic University, Class of 2022 constitute an appropriate population for examining this issue because they have completed academic modules concerning biomedical ethics and medical law while remaining within the undergraduate phase of medical education. This study therefore seeks to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between knowledge of medical malpractice and professional attitudes among these students. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence supporting curriculum evaluation and contribute to strengthening professionalism-oriented medical education by identifying the educational relevance of malpractice knowledge in shaping future physicians' professional conduct.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an analytical observational design using a cross-sectional approach to examine the relationship between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitudes among undergraduate medical students. The target population comprised medical students in Indonesia, while the accessible population consisted of active students from the Faculty of Medicine, Sultan Agung Islamic University (UNISSULA), Class of 2022, who had completed the Biomedical Ethics and Medical Law module. Based on a population of 225 eligible students, the minimum required sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula, yielding 144 respondents, all of whom met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria and completed the survey through a total sampling technique. The independent variable was knowledge of medical malpractice, operationalized as students' understanding of medico-legal and ethical principles, including the four essential elements of malpractice (duty, dereliction, damage, and direct causation), and measured using a 30-item Guttman-scale questionnaire. The dependent variable was professionalism attitude, assessed through a validated 15-item self-assessment instrument based on four core domains excellence, accountability, altruism, and humanism using a four-point Likert scale. The knowledge questionnaire was adapted from previous malpractice-related research and further developed with additional items derived from the Indonesian Code of Medical Ethics (KODEKI 2022) and Law No. 29 of 2004 on Medical Practice, whereas the professionalism questionnaire was adapted from a previously validated instrument for Indonesian medical students.

Data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire administered after pilot testing the instruments among 30–40 students who were not included in the primary sample. Prior to hypothesis testing, instrument quality was evaluated through Spearman's rank validity testing and Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, with a reliability threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.60$ indicating acceptable internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' characteristics and the distribution of each study variable, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The association between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitude was subsequently analyzed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, following the determination that the assumptions required for the Chi-square test were not satisfied because of the absence of category variation within the observed variables. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$, while the magnitude and direction of the observed relationship were interpreted according to the corresponding Spearman correlation coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	44	30.6
Female	100	69.4

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Total	144	100

Female respondents constituted the majority of the study population, accounting for 100 participants (69.4%), whereas male respondents comprised 44 participants (30.6%). This distribution indicates a predominance of female medical students among the respondents. The gender composition provides an overview of the demographic profile of the study sample.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
21 years	14	9.7
22 years	118	81.9
23 years	12	8.3
Total	144	100

Most respondents were 22 years old, representing 118 students (81.9%) of the total sample. Respondents aged 21 and 23 years accounted for 14 (9.7%) and 12 (8.3%) participants, respectively. These findings demonstrate that the respondents were relatively homogeneous with respect to age.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Academic Cohort

Academic Cohort	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
2022	144	100
Total	144	100

All respondents belonged to the 2022 academic cohort, comprising 144 students (100%). Consequently, no variation in academic cohort was observed within the study population. This homogeneous educational background minimizes potential differences attributable to variations in academic progression.

Medical Malpractice Knowledge

Table 4. Distribution of Medical Malpractice Knowledge

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High (>76%)	144	100
Moderate (56–75%)	0	0
Low (<55%)	0	0
Total	144	100

All respondents demonstrated a high level of medical malpractice knowledge, with every participant categorized in the high knowledge group. No respondents were classified into either the moderate or low knowledge categories. This distribution indicates a uniformly high level of understanding regarding medical malpractice among the participating students.

Professionalism Attitude

Table 5. Distribution of Professionalism Attitude

Professionalism Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Good	144	100
Fair	0	0
Poor	0	0
Total	144	100

All respondents exhibited a good level of professionalism, representing 100% of the study population. No respondents were categorized as having fair or poor professionalism attitudes. These findings indicate a consistently favorable professionalism profile among the undergraduate medical students.

Correlation Between Medical Malpractice Knowledge and Professionalism Attitude

Table 6. Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis Between Medical Malpractice Knowledge and Professionalism Attitude

	Medical Malpractice Knowledge	Professionalism Attitude
Spearman's rho		
Medical Malpractice Knowledge		
Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.288**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
N	144	144
Professionalism Attitude		
Correlation Coefficient	.288**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
N	144	144

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

The Spearman rank correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitude. The correlation coefficient was $r_s = 0.288$ with a significance value of $p = 0.000$, indicating that the observed association was statistically significant. Although significant, the correlation strength was weak, suggesting that medical malpractice knowledge represents only one of several factors contributing to students' professionalism attitudes.

Table 7. Summary of the Correlation Analysis

Relationship	Statistical Results	Conclusion
Relationship between Medical Malpractice Knowledge and Professionalism Attitude among Medical Students	$r_s = 0.288$ $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ $\alpha = 0.05$	There is a significant relationship between Medical Malpractice Knowledge and Professionalism Attitude among Medical Students.

The summary analysis confirms a statistically significant association between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitude. The positive correlation indicates that higher

levels of knowledge tend to be accompanied by better professionalism attitudes. Nevertheless, the relatively weak correlation suggests that additional determinants beyond medical malpractice knowledge contribute to the development of professionalism among medical students.

Medical Malpractice Knowledge among Medical Students

Medical malpractice knowledge among the respondents was consistently categorized as high, with all 144 participants (100%) achieving scores above the established threshold for the high-knowledge category. Completion of the Biomedical Ethics and Medical Law module prior to data collection appears to have provided students with a comprehensive understanding of malpractice concepts, including the four essential elements of duty, dereliction, damage, and direct causation, alongside the legal obligations governing medical practice in Indonesia. Educational strategies emphasizing ethics and interprofessional readiness, as discussed by Damayanti and Bachtiar (2020), reinforce the importance of integrating medico-legal competencies into undergraduate medical curricula to establish a strong professional foundation.

Professional knowledge regarding medical malpractice extends beyond familiarity with legal terminology because it equips future physicians with the capacity to recognize professional boundaries, evaluate clinical risks, and make ethically sound decisions before entering clinical practice. Dubai et al. (2019) describe professionalism as a multidimensional construct grounded in knowledge, ethical commitment, and accountability, while Lecours, Baril and Drolet (2021) similarly argue that professional identity develops through continuous integration of cognitive competence and professional values. Comprehensive knowledge of malpractice therefore represents an essential component of professional formation rather than merely a legal requirement.

Legal scholarship distinguishes medical malpractice from unavoidable medical risk by emphasizing negligence, deviation from professional standards, and failure to comply with accepted medical procedures. Kolib (2020) and Handoyo (2020) explain that malpractice arises only when healthcare providers violate established standards of care, whereas Handayani (2020) and Puspitasari (2018) further emphasize that medico-legal accountability may extend to civil, criminal, and administrative consequences depending on the characteristics of the violation. Strong understanding of these legal distinctions enables medical students to appreciate the practical implications of professional responsibility before assuming direct patient care.

Uniformly high knowledge among respondents also reflects the effectiveness of ethics-oriented learning implemented within the Faculty of Medicine of Universitas Islam Sultan Agung. Educational initiatives promoting character development and ethical awareness, as highlighted by Permatananda (2022), appear to have contributed substantially to students' mastery of malpractice-related concepts, while Gosal, Manampiring and Waha (2022) emphasize that ethical responsibility constitutes an inseparable element of clinical authority. Reports issued by the Professional Discipline Council of the Indonesian Health Council (Konsil Kesehatan Indonesia, 2025), together with analyses by Ponda et al. (2024), Koto and Asmadi (2021), Putra (2020), Setiawan, Octara and Sugiharta (2018), and Babys, Dioniki and Yusuf (2024), further underscore the continuing relevance of strengthening malpractice literacy because disciplinary violations and medico-legal disputes remain persistent challenges within Indonesian healthcare practice.

Professionalism Attitudes among Medical Students

Professionalism attitudes among the respondents were uniformly classified as good, with all 144 medical students (100%) achieving scores within the highest professionalism category. Assessment of professionalism encompassed the domains of excellence, accountability, altruism, and humanism, demonstrating that the respondents had successfully internalized the core professional values expected during undergraduate medical education. Soemantri (2023) emphasizes that the cultivation of professionalism should begin during the undergraduate phase because non-cognitive competencies are fundamental prerequisites for producing competent and trustworthy physicians.

Professional attitudes represent a dynamic integration of ethical values, personal responsibility, and behavioral commitment rather than the simple acquisition of theoretical knowledge. According to Lecours, Baril and Drolet (2021), professionalism reflects a sustained commitment to ethical conduct, competence, integrity, and patient-centered care throughout professional practice, whereas Dubai et al. (2019) identify accountability and continuous professional development as indispensable dimensions

of professional identity. Strong professionalism among the respondents therefore indicates that professional values have been effectively embedded within the academic learning environment before students transition into clinical education.

Educational experiences emphasizing ethical reasoning and character development have likely contributed substantially to the consistently high professionalism scores observed in this study. Permatananda (2022) argues that structured character education strengthens students' moral awareness and professional identity, while Damayanti and Bachtiar (2020) highlight that collaborative learning and interprofessional education encourage responsibility, communication, and respect for professional standards. Clinical professionalism further requires physicians to demonstrate ethical accountability during therapeutic interactions, as explained by Gosal, Manampiring and Waha (2022), making early professional formation an essential objective of undergraduate medical education.

Positive professionalism demonstrated by all respondents also possesses important implications for future healthcare quality because professional conduct directly influences patient trust and satisfaction. Findings reported by Putri Irnanda and Surya Wanasida (2022) indicate that higher physician professionalism is associated with improved patient satisfaction, whereas Sihotang and Hoesein (2025) emphasize that professional standards simultaneously protect patients' rights and strengthen dispute resolution within healthcare systems. Psychological well-being should nevertheless remain an important consideration because Nurkholisah, Meidianawaty and Fachrudin (2025) as well as Marlina Wati, Dewinta Farma and Susanti (2025) demonstrate that mental well-being and academic burden substantially influence the maintenance of professional behavior throughout medical education.

Relationship between Medical Malpractice Knowledge and Professionalism Attitudes

Statistical analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitudes among undergraduate medical students. Spearman's rank correlation analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r_s = 0.288$ with a p -value = 0.000, indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected and that greater knowledge of medical malpractice was associated with better professionalism attitudes. Interpretation proposed by Schober, Boer, and Schwarte (2018) classifies this coefficient as a weak positive correlation, suggesting that although the relationship is statistically significant, its practical strength remains limited.

Medical malpractice knowledge contributes to professionalism by strengthening students' awareness of ethical obligations, legal accountability, and appropriate clinical decision-making before entering professional practice. Putra and Listyaningrum (2024) similarly reported a positive association between knowledge of professional ethics and attitudes toward clinical practice, supporting the proposition that ethical literacy functions as an important educational foundation for professional behavior. Findings reported by Gosal, Manampiring and Waha (2022) further reinforce this interpretation by emphasizing that professional responsibility emerges through the integration of ethical principles, competence, and accountability during therapeutic interactions.

Correlation analysis also revealed that the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.083$) accounted for only 8.3% of the variation in professionalism attitudes, leaving approximately 91.7% attributable to other variables not examined in this study. Psychological well-being, according to Nurkholisah, Meidianawaty and Fachrudin (2025), represents one important determinant of professionalism, whereas Marlina Wati, Dewinta Farma and Susanti (2025) demonstrate that burnout and academic demands may substantially influence students' professional performance. Professional identity is therefore better understood as the product of multiple interacting educational, psychological, and environmental factors rather than the consequence of medico-legal knowledge alone.

Professionalism development should consequently be approached through comprehensive educational strategies that integrate cognitive, behavioral, and experiential learning. Experiential learning, ethical case discussions, clinical simulation, reflective practice, mentorship, and exposure to positive role models provide opportunities for students to translate theoretical knowledge into observable professional behavior, consistent with the educational perspectives advanced by Permatananda (2022), Damayanti and Bachtiar (2020), and Soemantri (2023). Sustainable professional competence therefore requires continuous reinforcement of ethical awareness alongside institutional efforts to cultivate integrity, accountability, and patient-centered values throughout undergraduate medical education.

Study Implications and Limitations

Findings of this study provide important implications for undergraduate medical education by demonstrating that high levels of medical malpractice knowledge are positively associated with professionalism attitudes, despite the relatively weak strength of the relationship. Curriculum developers should therefore recognize that medico-legal education remains an essential component of professional formation while simultaneously acknowledging that professionalism extends beyond cognitive understanding alone. Contemporary healthcare systems require future physicians to integrate ethical reasoning, legal awareness, communication skills, and patient-centered values in accordance with professional standards and patient protection principles described by Sihotang and Hoesein (2025).

Uniformly high scores observed for both study variables also indicate that the current curriculum has been successful in establishing a solid foundation of ethical and professional competence among undergraduate medical students. Complete mastery of medical malpractice knowledge and consistently positive professionalism attitudes suggest that the Biomedical Ethics and Medical Law module has effectively achieved its intended educational objectives before students enter clinical rotations. Sustained reinforcement through case-based discussions, reflective learning, and supervised clinical experiences should nevertheless remain educational priorities because professional identity continues to evolve throughout medical training and subsequent professional practice.

Methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings because both study variables demonstrated a pronounced ceiling effect, with all respondents (100%) being classified within the highest categories of knowledge and professionalism. Limited variability may have resulted from the relatively low discriminatory capacity of the medical malpractice knowledge instrument together with the possibility of social desirability bias associated with self-assessment measures of professionalism. Homogeneous score distributions consequently reduced statistical variability and likely contributed to the relatively weak correlation coefficient despite the existence of a statistically significant relationship.

Future investigations should therefore employ assessment instruments with broader levels of difficulty, incorporating easy, moderate, and advanced items capable of differentiating students across wider ranges of medico-legal competence. Multi-method approaches combining objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs), scenario-based assessments, faculty evaluations, peer assessments, and longitudinal follow-up during clinical clerkship would provide a more comprehensive evaluation of professionalism than self-reported questionnaires alone. Broader institutional sampling and inclusion of additional determinants such as psychological well-being, mentorship, role modeling, academic stress, learning climate, and social support are also recommended to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model of professionalism among medical students.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that all undergraduate medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Class of 2022, exhibited a high level of medical malpractice knowledge (100%; mean = 87.85 ± 5.80) and a good level of professionalism attitude (100%; mean = 87.01 ± 2.27), indicating the effectiveness of the undergraduate curriculum in fostering medico-legal awareness and professional values. Statistical analysis further revealed a significant positive relationship between medical malpractice knowledge and professionalism attitude ($r_s = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$), although the weak correlation suggests that professionalism is influenced by multiple determinants beyond cognitive understanding of malpractice, including role models, psychological well-being, and social support. These findings underscore the importance of complementing ethics and medical law instruction with experiential learning, reflective practice, mentorship, and psychologically supportive educational environments to strengthen professional identity formation throughout undergraduate medical education. Future research should employ measurement instruments with greater discriminatory capacity and incorporate additional psychosocial and educational variables to better explain the multidimensional nature of professionalism while minimizing ceiling effects observed in the present study.

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