

## Original Article

# Professional Selves and Profession Perception of Nursing Senior Students

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### Abstract

**Background:** Clinical environment provides students with the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the courses to real patients under the guidance of clinical nurses.

**Methods:** The population of the study was 60 students enrolled in the course "Internal Medicine Nursing Internship Practice" in the 4th grade of a State University Health Sciences Faculty Nursing Department program, and the sample was 50 students who agreed to participate in the study.

**Results:** The mean Nursing Profession Perception Scale total score was  $91.50 \pm 9.547$  before the internship and  $91.80 \pm 8.164$  after the internship. While the students' professional self-perception before the internship was  $142.26 \pm 14.834$ , after the internship, it was  $135.96 \pm 15.494$ , with a significant difference between the two measurements.

**Conclusions:** As a result of this study, it was found that the internship practice did not cause a change in their perception of the profession, and did not contribute positively to their professional self-concept.

**Keywords:** Nursing senior students, internship practice, perception of the profession, professional self-setting.

### Introduction

The fact that nursing is a practice-oriented profession correlates strongly with theoretical and clinical training. Skills in nursing education are mainly acquired through experiences in the clinical setting, and these experiences constitute the "clinical learning environment." The clinical environment provides students with the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the courses to real patients under the guidance of clinical nurses (Ewertsson, Bagga-Gupta, Allvin, & Blomberg, 2017; O'Mara, McDonald, Gillespie, Brown, & Miles, 2014). At the same time, students learn to apply nursing knowledge, nursing skills, patient communication, and professionalization to clinical teaching and

prepare for application in their future workplace (Skaalvik, Normann, & Henriksen, 2011). Clinical teaching is an essential part of nursing education in this context (Skaalvik et al., 2011). In our country, internship practice, which is an essential program for shaping nursing students' identities as future professional nurses, is conducted in the form of one or two semesters in the final year and aims to equip students with competencies in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills before graduation (Sahin Hotun et al., 2016).

High quality nursing care depends on the professional knowledge and skills of the nursing staff as well as on their professional self-image, and professional perception (Gozel, Atmaca, & Durat, 2017; Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2017). However,

the phrases "professional self-concept," "professionalism," "professional identity," "professional self-image," and "professional identity" have approximately the same meaning (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998). Professional self-concept refers to nurses' subjective experiences, including their views about themselves, cognitive and emotional aspects in their nursing role, expertise in nursing practice, team environment, and nursing activities (Angel, Craven, & Denson, 2012). Nursing students with a professional self-concept are more likely to be optimistic about events in the nursing profession (Chang, Yeh, Lin, & Wang, 2021). One of the goals of intern practice is to boost nursing students' self-confidence and assertiveness in clinical practice. The professional self whose seed is planted with internship practice is reported as an ongoing process after becoming a licensed nurse in a hospital setting (Arthur, 1992). Because professional identity should be nurtured during the years of education as a student and developed within a professional nursing culture (Bjorkstrom, Athlin, & Johansson, 2008).

Defining and internalizing the profession chosen by the individual is defined as the perception of the profession. In the internship, students are confronted with the relationship between theoretical training and clinical reality (Papathanasiou, Tsaras, & Sarafis, 2014). Students' thoughts and perceptions about the profession may change positively or negatively at the end of the internship (Nilsson & Silén, 2010). The professional perceptions of intern nurses are essential because they can influence relationships with clinically active nurses and members of other disciplines and patients (Güven & Unsal, 2020).

"Profession Self" and "Occupation Perception" have an important relationship and are affected by various factors. This study aims to evaluate whether students' professional self-perceptions, and professional perceptions changed before and after the internship, the final step in becoming a nurse.

**Research question:** Is there a difference between students' professional perception,

and professional identity values before and after the internship?

## **Methods**

**Type of research:** This study was conducted in descriptive form.

**The population and the sample of the research:** The target population of the research consisted of 60 students enrolled in the course "Internal Medicine Nursing Internship Practise" in the 4th class of a State University Health Sciences Faculty Nursing Department program in the academic year 2020-2021. In the eighth semester, internship practice is carried out in the faculty, where the research was conducted in the form of one hour of theoretical lecture and 31 hours of clinical practice. Only the course "Internal Medicine Nursing Internship Practice" was included in the intern application program due to the Covid 19 Pandemic in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. It is expected that students taking this course will be able to perform applications related to the protection and development of health and gain experience in the early detection, treatment, and rehabilitation of disease. The criteria for inclusion in the study were set as follows: a) voluntary participation in the study, the criteria for exclusion in the study were set as follows: a) failure in the Internal Medicine Nursing Internship Practice course due to absence, b) incomplete completion of data collection forms, c) desire to withdraw from the research." The study was completed with 50 students who agreed to participate and fully completed the data collection instruments at pre-test and post-test. Before (March 2021) and after the internship, data collection forms were used as a pre-test and post-test (June 2021). In the study, the following data collection instruments were used.

In the Student Information Form, there are questions about the student's age, gender, satisfaction with being a nursing student, whether they find nursing suitable for their voluntary choice of the nursing profession, the status of nursing in Turkish society, the status of thinking about pursuing a degree and/or doctorate in nursing in the future, and the situation of choosing to nurse again.

The Professional Self-Concept Scale in Student Nurses (PSCSSN) was developed by

Sabanciogullari and Dogan (2011), and validity and reliability studies have been conducted. 31 items of the scale, consisting of 45 items, are expressed straightforwardly, and 14 are expressed inversely. Professional satisfaction, professional competence, and professional qualifications are the three sub-dimensions of the scale. "Professional Satisfaction" refers to the professional satisfaction and happiness of nursing students; "Professional Competence" refers to the professional qualifications required to fulfill the nursing profession; and "Professional Qualifications" refers to feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about the profession's qualifications and their fulfillment. The high scores indicate that nursing students' professional self-concept has developed positively (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2011).

Eser et al. (2006) developed the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (NPPS) to assess nurses' perceptions of their profession. It is a 5-point Likert scale with 22 items and two sub-dimensions:

"Professional Qualifications" and "Professional Status." "Professional Qualifications" subdimension, nursing contains expressions that describe many aspects of the profession, such as intense communication, self-sacrifice, independent practices, knowledge-based, skill-based, satisfying, tiring, stressful, severe working conditions, teamwork, use of technology, use of problem-solving skills, and science-based profession that requires a higher education. The "Professional Status" sub-dimension consists of expressions that include the position of nursing among other health professions, its prestige, and its place in society. The increase in the total score from the scale shows that the profession's perception is positive (Eser, Khorshid, & Denat, 2006).

**Evaluation of data:** Data were analyzed in the SPSS 23.0 program, and conformity to the normal distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The data were found to have a normal distribution, and therefore parametric tests were used. In addition to descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) in analyzing the data, the paired-samples test was used to test the difference between two different measurement time points obtained from the

same individuals, and the Chi-square test was used for comparative analysis of binary categorical variables. In the entire study, a significance level of 0.05 was accepted.

**The ethical aspect of the research:** Permission was obtained from the university's Ethics Committee (number: 166/24.02.2021) to conduct the research. The study's objective was presented to students who decided to participate, and verbal and informed consent was received from the students.

## Results

### Results on introductory characteristics of nursing students and their opinions about the profession

The mean age of the students included in the study was  $22.02 \pm 0.891$ , and 72% were women. There was no change in the percentage of student responses to the two questions in the pre-and post-internship practice evaluations. The findings we obtained from these questions are that 68% of students are satisfied with their choice of the nursing department, and 64% choose to nurse voluntarily. 72% of the students before the internship and 68% after the internship said they find the nursing profession suitable. It was found that 68% of the students wanted to pursue a master's and/or doctoral degree in nursing before the internship and 60% after the internship. Students' willingness to choose to nurse again if given a choice was 46% in the pre-internship period and 54% in the post-internship period (Table 1).

### Results of nursing students on professional self-concept

The mean score of the PSCSSN dimension "professional competence" was  $21.50 \pm 4.219$  before and after the internship. While the mean value of the dimension "professional qualification" was  $98.00 \pm 9.720$  before the internship, it decreased after the internship and was  $92.79 \pm 10.390$ , with a significant difference between the two measurements ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mean score of the job satisfaction dimension, which was  $22.76 \pm 0.505$  before the internship, was reduced and was found to be  $21.56 \pm 3.104$ . While the students' professional self-perception before the internship was  $142.26 \pm 14.834$ , after the internship, it was  $135.96 \pm 15.494$ , with a

significant difference between the two measurements ( $p < 0.05$ ). While the overall score averages indicate that professional self-concept is high among students, the average score decreased after the internship (Table 2).

**Results on student nurses' perceptions of the profession.**

While the mean value of the sub-dimension "professional qualification" before the internship was  $76.18 \pm 7.107$ , after the internship, it was found to be  $74.96 \pm 6.788$ , with no significant difference between the two measurements ( $p > 0.05$ ). While the mean of

the Professional Status subdimension before the internship was  $15.32 \pm 5.007$ , after the internship, it was found to be  $16.84 \pm 4.473$ , with no significant difference between the two measurements ( $p > 0.05$ ). The mean NPPS total score was  $91.50 \pm 9.547$  before the internship and  $91.80 \pm 8.164$  after the internship. It was found that the average score of professional qualification tends to decrease, while the score of professional status tends to increase. The mean scores of the students' perceptions of the profession show that they are high in both measures (Table 3).

**Table 1. Distribution of students' introductory characteristics and their views on the profession**

		n (50)		%		
Gender	Female	36		72		
	Male	14		28		
Average age		22.02±.891 (min-max:20-24)				
		Pre-internship		Post-internship		
		n	%	n	%	
Satisfaction with choice of nursing department	Yes	34	68	34	68	$\chi^2 = .530$ $p = .467$
	No	16	32	16	32	
Voluntary choice of the nursing profession	Yes	32	64	32	64	$\chi^2 = .087$ $p = .768$
	No	18	36	18	36	
Finding the nursing profession suitable for you	Yes	36	72	34	68	$\chi^2 = .999$ $p = .318$
	No	14	28	16	32	
Are you considering a master's or doctorate?	Yes	36	68	30	60	$\chi^2 = 1.058$ $p = .304$
	No	14	32	20	40	
Willingness to choose to nurse again	Yes	23	46	27	54	$\chi^2 = .109$ $p = .741$
	No	27	54	23	46	

\* $p < 0.05$   $\chi^2$  Chi-square test

**Table 2. Distribution of scores for students' professional self-perception.**

PSCSSN and its sub-dimensions	Pre-internship	Post-internship	Test** and p values
	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	
Professional Competence	21.50±4.219	21.50±5.496	t= .000 p=1.000
Professional Qualifications	98.00±9.720	92.79±10.390	t= 2.563 <b>p=.014*</b>
Professional Satisfaction	22.76±.505	21.56±3.104	t= 1.756 p=.085
Perception Scale Total Score	142.26±14.834	135.96±15.494	t=1.998 <b>p=.050*</b>

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* Paired-sample test SD: standard deviation

**Table 3. Distribution of the values for the professional perception of the students**

NPPS and its sub-dimensions	Pre-internship	Post-internship	Test** and p* values
	Mean ±SD	Mean ±SD	
Profession Qualifications	76.18±7.107	74.96±6.788	t= 1.148 p=.256
Professional Status	15.32±5.007	16.84±4.473	t= -1.474 p=.147
Perception Scale Total Score	91.50±9.547	91.80±8.164	t=-.190 p=.850

\*p<0.05 \*\* Paired-sample test SD: standard deviation

## Discussion

Face-to-face education in Turkey was suspended in March 2020, as were clinical practices in nursing education. About a year later, the students who studied at the faculty where the research was conducted went to clinical practice for the internship course. This study was conducted to determine if the 32-hour weekly internship course produced any changes in the students' professional perceptions, and professional selves.

In this study, high scores were found for students' perceptions of the nursing profession, but there was no difference between the two measures in pre-and post-internship evaluations. The gap between expectations and reality in nursing students' clinical learning environments is an international phenomenon (Nilsson & Silén, 2010). The fact that the value for the perception of the nursing profession did not change after the internship in this study could be due to a gap between theory and practice. There are differing opinions on whether the perception of nursing actually changes as students progress through the nursing program. Granum (2004) discovered that student perceptions change as an undergraduate program continues. Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer (2006) assessed students' professional perceptions at the beginning of the nursing program after six months of classroom education experience and clinical rotations. They found few significant differences in statistical analyzes after classroom education and clinical practice, but 95% of students reported that they believed their perceptions about nursing had changed after the clinical experience.

In the health profession, the development of a professional self-concept is recognized as a universal goal. Society's impression of nursing strongly influences professional self-concept, and nurses are concerned about their image (Poorgholami, Ramezanli, Jahromi, & Jahromi, 2016; ten Hoeve, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2014). This study's total average PSCSSN score reveals that intern students' professional self-concept is above a moderate level. The fact that the PSCSSN scale score was lower after the internship in our study and the difference between the two measurements was statistically significant is a remarkable result. However, it can be seen that the average score related to feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of nursing expressed as a professional qualification decreased when measured after the internship. Students have different internship experiences in different clinics. In this phase, they interact with medical professionals from different disciplines. Students' feelings and thoughts regarding their professional self-concept may have been influenced by these clinical areas where they do not yet see themselves as sufficient. The decrease in PSCSSN score after the internship may initially be considered an unexpected finding. However, professional self-development begins with undergraduate education and continues throughout an individual's professional life, and internship practice is one of the first stages it transforms. In this transformation, the academic process, the gap between profession and theory, experience and culture are effective (Yalciner et al., 2018). The gap between theory and practice may be another factor affecting students' professional self-concept.

Values taught in nursing education are not always liked or desired by nurses in clinical practice (Henderson, 2002; Nilsson & Silen, 2010). The feelings and thoughts of students practicing in a clinical setting that emphasizes technical skills and talents regarding the profession and professional self-concept may have been influenced.

In contrast to the results of our study, the study by Erdogan et al. (2021) found that internships minimally increased students' personal and professional self-concept, cohesion level, and professionalism attitudes. The questions of how nursing students see themselves and what qualifications interest them are of great importance. The results of a study on this topic showed a significant relationship between nursing students' professional self-concept and their willingness to stay in nursing (Badiyepeyma et al., 2014). It has been found that students with good professional self-development have better self-confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills and can better plan and deliver care to patients and their families (Milisen, De Busser, Kayaert, Abraham, & de Casterlé, 2010). In one study, it was found that as students' application stress increased, their professional satisfaction increased, and as their overall stress and academic stress scores experienced during their nursing education increased, their professional qualification scores increased (Karabulutlu Yılmaz, Oruç Gunduz, & Turan Bahcecioglu, 2019). For this reason, nursing education should encourage the creation of appropriate opportunities and environments to develop students' self-concept and increase their self-confidence (Hughes, Wade, & Peters, 1991).

**Limitations:** This study has some limitations; firstly, the study was conducted with the participation of students from a single faculty. Also, the students who participated in the study conducted their internships in different clinics.

**Conclusion:** The purpose of this study is to determine if the professional selves, and professional perceptions of nursing students who complete an internship change. As a result of this study, it was found that the internship did not cause a change in their perception of the profession, and did not

contribute positively to their professional self-concept. It is recommended that future additional studies be conducted by expanding the sample in nursing departments from different universities, analyzing the results between different curricula, and also comparing the results with nursing programs from different countries.

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