Original Article

The Role of Nurses in Professional Perceptions of Nursing Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Students who wish to be a nurse usually have little knowledge about nursing practices or the requirements of nursing education.   This lack of knowledge affects the profession perceptions of some students either positively or negatively.   It is known that the perception of the nursing students begin to shape during their experiences in nursing education. In the literature, there are many studies investigating professional perception levels of nursing students and nurses. However, no study has been found investigating the role of nurses in profession perceptions of the nursing students..

Purpose: This study was conducted to determine the impact of nurses on professional perceptions of nursing students.

Method: This cross-sectional study was conducted in February, 2015. The population of the research was composed of 193 students studying in the 3rd and 4th grades of Nursing Department in Aydın School of Health. As the data collection tools, personal information form and Nursing Profession Perception Scale were used. SPSS 21 program was used while assessing the data obtained from the study.

Findings: The mean age of the students who participated in the research was 21.83±1.151, and 72.3% of the students were female (n=120) and 27.7% of them were male (n= 46). The mean professional perception scores of the students was 87.11±12.822, and the mean score in female students was 89.60±12.018 while the mean score in male students was 80.57±12.685. The difference between male and female students' professional perception mean scores was statistically significant (U=1637.000, p<0.001). There was a significant difference between professional perception mean scores of 4th grade students and those of 3rd grade students (U=2744.000, p=0.023).

Conclusion: As a result of the research, it was concluded that professional perception mean score was significantly different between male and female students, that there was a significant difference between professional perception scores according to their class levels and that the nurses that nursing students were together with in professional practices had impact on students' professional perceptions.

Key Words: Professional Perception, Nursing Education, Nursing Students.

Introduction

Profession is defined as a set of activities that people perform to earn their livings, based on the knowledge and skills they acquire through a specific training (Beydag and Arslan, 2008).

Professions can be perceived differently in terms of the individuals who perform these professions and the society. Professional perception is also influenced by traditional, cultural, societal and socio-economic factors (Hoeve, Jansen and Roodbol, 2014). Behaviors, attitudes and the

worldview related to the profession represent the perception of the individuals towards their professions (Ozer, 2015).

The perception of the societies towards the nursing profession has varied throughout history. From a general picture, public images of nursing such as that nurses have low socio-economic status, nursing is perceived as women's profession, and that it has a role of supporting the doctor, are common. However, during the last three decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, nursing has made tremendous progress as a discipline, especially in terms of professional development. Nursing is accepted in our country as a professional job of self-sacrifice, caring and helping patients (Oz, 2004).

On the basis of a professional job, there lies the professional loyalty and organization (Dogan Merih and Arslan, 2012). The premises of adopting and professionally applying the profession, that is to say, vocational consciousness, is laid during the time of being a student and continues throughout the professional life (Beydag and Arslan, 2008). Perception in nursing students contributes to the formation of the meaning and perspective attributed to the profession as a result of increase on the knowledge of nursing practices and experience (Andersson, 1993).

Perceiving the professional qualities of nursing is achieved through the first clinical application (Eser, Khorshid and Denat, 2008). However, questioning professional perception beginning from the first step to the university should be among the first targets (Lai *et al.*, 2008). The meanings attributed to the profession enable the development of the profession in the following years and undertake an important place in increasing the job satisfaction of the members (Sirin *et al.*, 2008). Self-conception, self-esteem, recruitment and performance are thought to have impact on nursing students' perception of nursing as a profession (Wallace, 2007).

Brodie et al. (2004) found in their study of the students' perceptions towards nursing profession that the students' professional perceptions before nursing education were significantly different (Brodie *et al.*, 2004). They expressed that the change in the students' nursing profession perceptions was related to the duration of being exposed to both educational and clinical settings. Before beginning to have nursing education,

many students accepted the nursing profession as a highly ordinary profession. They underestimated the depth of knowledge and responsibility in the role of nursing profession. As the students progressed through nursing education processes, they realized that the value and independence of nursing profession was versatile and diverse (Brodie *et al.*, 2004).

In their study conducted to investigate the impact of clinical applications on the students' perspectives of their professions, Demirkiran et al. (2005) found that there were positive changes in majority of the students' (80.9%) perspectives of the profession after the first clinical application (Demirkiran, Turk and Denat, 2005). Denat et al. (2016) found in their study that the perceptions of nursing students towards the profession changed in the positive way as they progressed through nursing education process (Denat, Gurol Arslan and Sahbaz, 2016).

The positive perception of the nursing profession is of great importance for the students who will choose the profession and therefore for the society. When the existing studies in the literature were examined, it was found that there were many studies related to professional perceptions of nursing students, nurses and other health professionals (Brodie *et al.*, 2004; Demirkiran, Turk and Denat, 2005; Wallace, 2007; Garbee and Killacky, 2008; Taskin Yilmaz, Tiryaki Sen and Demirkaya, 2015; Akman Yilmaz *et al.*, 2016; Denat, Gurol Arslan and Sahbaz, 2016; Ozmen and Cetinkaya, 2016). However, no study has been found examining the impact of nurses on professional perceptions of nursing students. In the light of this knowledge, this study was conducted to determine the role of the nurses in professional perceptions of nursing students.

Methods

Type of the Research: This cross-sectional study was conducted in February, 2015.

The Population and Sample of the Research: The population of the research was composed of 193 bachelor's degree students studying in the 3rd and 4th grades of Nursing Department in Aydın School of Health, a state university located in Aydın province, a western city of Turkey. The sample of the study was found 129 with a 95% confidence level according to stratified sampling method, and this number was taken as 168, considering the design effect as 1,3. It was

planned to reach at least 66 students from 3rd grade students and 88 students from 4th grade students. The study was conducted with 166 students who volunteered to participate in the research.

Data Collection Tools: As the data collection tools, personal information form and Nursing Profession Perception Scale were used.

Personal information form; As a result of reviewing the related literature by the researchers, 45 questions were formed in the form of open-ended and multiple choice. The questions on the form are composed of the questions related to socio-demographic characteristics, the perceptions of the students towards the profession, and the multiple-choice questions that investigate the relationship of the nurses with the students, patients and other health professionals in clinical applications.

Nursing Profession Perception Scale; "Nursing Profession Perception Scale (NPPS)" was developed by Eser et al. (2004) and it is in Turkish language.

NPPS is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting 22 items. The scale has two sub-dimensions; "Professional Qualities", which is composed of 17 items defining different aspects of the profession, and "Professional Status", which is composed of 5 items representing the position of the profession within the society. There is no cutting point in NPSS. The highest score in the scale is 110 and the lowest score is 22; the highest score for the "Professional Qualities" sub-dimension is 85 and the lowest score is 17. The highest and lowest scores of the "Professional Status" sub-dimension are 25 and 5, respectively. The increase in the total score obtained from the scale indicates that professional perception is positive (Eser, Khorshid and Denat, 2004)."Professional Qualities" sub-dimension includes statements defining various aspects of the profession such as; nursing necessitates intensive communication, self-sacrifice, it has independent practices, heavy working conditions, it is knowledge and skill based, satisfying, exhausting, stressful, based on science which requires team work, the use of technology, the use of problem solving skills and higher education.

"Professional Status" sub-dimension is composed of statements which include the position of nursing among other health professions, its prestige and place within the society. It was found that Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the overall scale was 0.83, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of "Professional Qualities" sub-dimension was 0.85 and that of "Professional Status" sub-dimension was 0.79. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the overall scale was 0.89, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of "Professional Qualities" sub-dimension was 0.96 and that of "Professional Status" sub-dimension was 0.67.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistical tests, Kruskal-Wallis, One-Way ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U test, Chi-square test and Student t test were used in the evaluation of the obtained data. While evaluating the data obtained, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 21 program was used for statistical analyses. The variables; the students are appreciated by the nurses, the students see the nurses as role models in clinical applications, and the behaviors of nurses which have a positive effect on the students' professional perception during clinical applications have a normal distribution. For this reason, ANOVA and Independent t test were used in the analysis of these variables. The variables; the students' class levels, gender and considering being a member of any association related to the profession do not show normal distribution. These variables were analyzed with Mann Whitney U test. Besides, median, minimum and maximum values were given instead of the mean scores.

Results

The mean age of the students who participated in the research was 21.83±1.151, and 54.8% (n=91) were 3rd grade students while 45.2% (n=75) were 4th graders. 72.3% of the students (n=120) were female and 27.7% of them (n= 46) were male, and 44.6% expressed that the place they lived the longest was the center of the province (Table 1).

Of the students, 56% (n = 93) regarded the nurses' approach to them as cold and irrelevant, and 36.7% (n = 61) regarded the relationship of nurses with other health professionals as open to cooperation, 39.2% (n=65) regarded the relationship of nurses with patients as authoritarian (Table 2). The students' professional perception mean score was found 87.11±12.822, the mean score of female students was 89.60±12.018 and the mean score of male students was 80.57±12.685.

Table 1: Students' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic Characteristics	n	%
Class		
3rd Grade	91	54.8
4th Grade	75	45.2
Gender		
Female	120	72.3
Male	46	27.7
Age	**Range**	**x̄±SS**
	20-26	21.83±1.151
The place where Students lived the longest		
Center of the Province	74	44.6
Town	70	42.2
Village	22	13.2

Table 2: The Views/Perceptions of the Students towards the Nurses during Clinical Applications

	n	%
Nurses' approach to students during clinical applications*		
Cold and irrelevant	93	56
Remote/inapproachable	61	36.7
Open to cooperation	57	34.3
Behaving like there is no one in front of them/ignoring	55	33.1
Supportive	53	31.9
Close to communication	53	31.9
Being interested	52	31.3
Relationship of nurses with other health professionals*		
Open to cooperation	61	36.7
Able to express his/her own opinions	44	26.5
Being interested	43	25.9
Authoritarian	41	24.7
Defensive	41	24.7
Cold and irrelevant	40	24.1
Mesafeli	40	24.1
Relationship of nurses with patients*		
Authoritarian	65	39.2
Remote/inapproachable	64	38.6
Cold and irrelevant	63	38
Helpful	53	31.9
Close to communication	47	28.3
Being interested	46	27.7
Behaving like there is no one in front of them/ignoring	44	26.5
Supportive	41	24.7

* The students were asked to circle more than one answer.

Table 3: The Comparison of the Students' Professional Perception Scale Scores According to their Socio-demographic Characteristics

	Professional Perception Scale				
	Median	**Min**	**Max**	**U**	**p**
Class					
3rd grade (n=91)	86	52	110	2744.000*	**p=0.023**
4th grade (n=75)	92	62	110		
Gender					
Female (n=120)	92	55	110	1637.000*	**p<0.001**
Male (n=46)	81	52	106		
Being a member of a professional association					
Considering (n=142)	91	52	110	1025.500*	**p=0.002**
Not considering (n=24)	81	62	103		

*Mann Whithney U test

Table 4: The Comparison of the Students' Professional Perception Scale Scores According to Their Views Related to the Behaviors of the Nurses

	Professional Perception Scale Total Scores
	$\bar{x}\pm ss$
Nurses' Characteristics That Left A Positive Impact On Students' Views to Profession	
Did not leave a positive impact (n=9)	77.78±12.407
Being equipped in terms of theory and clinical knowledge (n=7)	97.43±9.108
Fulfilling the requirements of the profession (n=23)	92.30±11.511
Being supportive/helpful (n=40)	91.20±10.449
	F=6.241* **p<0.001**
Being Appreciated By Nurses During Clinical Applications	
Appreciated (n=106)	89.58±12.002
Not appreciated (n=58)	82.84±12.674
	t=-3.371** **p=0.001**
Students' Considering Nurses As Role Models During Clinical Applications	
Consider as role models (n=126)	89.08±12.062
Not consider as role models (n=32)	80.88±13.249
	t=-3.368** **p=0.001**

*Anova, **Independent t test

Table 5: Students' situation of considering nurses as role models for those who were appreciated by the nurses

		Situation of students' considering nurses as role models in clinical field		
		No, it did not happen	Yes, it happened	Total
Situation of students' being appreciated by nurses in clinical field	**No**	19	36	55
	Yes	13	90	103
	Total	32	126	158

*Chi-square

Table 6: The Comparison of the Students' Professional Status and Professional Qualities Sub-scale Scores According to Gender

	Professional Status Sub-scale			Professional Qualities Sub-scale		
	Median	**Min**	**Max**	**Median**	**Min**	**Max**
Gender						
Female (n=120)	16	5	25	77	39	85
Male (n=46)	15	8	24	66	37	83
	2430.000*			1463.500*		
	p=0.232			**<0.001**		

*Mann Whithney U Test

Table 7: The Comparison of the Students' Professional Status and Professional Qualities Sub-scale Scores According to Class Level

	Professional Status			Professional Qualities		
	Median	**Min**	**Max**	**Median**	**Min**	**Max**
Class						
3rd grade (n=91)	16	5	25	70,5	37	85
4th grade (n=75)	16	7	25	76	48	85
	3123.500*			2763.000*		
	p=0.292			**p=0.027**		

*Mann Whithney U Test

It was revealed that professional perception scores of female students was significantly higher than that of male students (U=1637.000, p<0.001). It was found that professional perception scores of 4th grade students was significantly higher than that of 3rd grade students (U=2744.000, p=0.023). It was also revealed that professional perception scores of the students considering being a member of any association related to the profession when they began work was significantly higher than that of the students

not considering being a member of any association (U=1025.500, p=0.002) (Table 3).

It was found that there was a significant difference between professional perception mean scores of the students who expressed that the behaviors of the nurses during clinical applications did not leave a positive impact on their professional perception and those of the students who expressed that being equipped in terms of theory and clinical knowledge (F=19.651, p=0.022), fulfilling the requirements of the profession (F=14.527, p=0.039), and being supportive/helpful (F=13.422, p=0.045) behaviors of the nurses left a positive impact on their professional perception (Table 4).

It was revealed that there was a significant difference (t=-3.371, p=0.001) between professional perception mean scores of the students who were appreciated by the nurses during clinical applications (89.58±12.002) and those of the students who were not appreciated (82.84±12.674). It was revealed that there was a significant difference (t= -3.368, p=0.001) between professional perception mean scores of the students who considered the nurses as role models during clinical applications (89.08±12.062) and those of the students who did not consider them as role models (80.88±13.249) (Table 4).

It was found that the students who were appreciated by the nurses during clinical applications considered the nurses as role models 3.65 times higher than the students who were not appreciated (OR=3.654) and this difference was statistically significant (x^2 (1)=10.67, p=0.001) (Table 5).

When the sub-scales of professional perception scale were analyzed, no significant difference was found between professional status sub-scale scores of female and male students (U=2430.000; p=0.232). However, there was a significant difference between professional qualities sub-scale scores of female and male students(U=1463.500; p<0.001) (Table 6).

No significant difference was found between professional status sub-scale scores of students according to their class levels (U=3123.500; p=0.292). It was revealed that professional qualities sub-scale scores of 4th grade students were significantly higher than those of 3rd grade students (U=2763.000; p=0.027) (Table 7).

Discussion

This research was conducted in analytical cross-sectional design with 166 nursing students to determine the role of nurses in professional perceptions of nursing students. It was revealed in the study that having education at a higher class level, being female, considering being a member of a professional association at the beginning of work, considering that the behaviors of the nurses during clinical applications have a positive effect on professional perception, being appreciated by the nurses during clinical applications, and regarding nurses as role models positively affected professional perceptions of the students. These results are significant in terms of revealing the effects of the nurses on forming professional perceptions of nursing students in our country.

In this study, the students' professional perception scale and sub-scales scores are similar to the scores of the students in other studies conducted in our country (Eser, Khorshid and Denat, 2008; Cinar Yucel *et al.*, 2011). It can be said considering the studies in the last decade that nursing students have a generally positive professional perceptions (Grainger and Bolan, 2006; Dinc, Kaya and Simsek, 2007; Zhang and Petrini, 2008; Guducu Tufekci and Yildiz, 2009; Patidar *et al.*, 2011).

In this study, it was revealed that 4th grade students had a higher professional perception score than 3rd grade students. In other words, it can be said that as the educational periods of the students increased, their professional perceptions improved positively. When the sub-dimensions of the professional perception scale were analyzed, it was revealed that there was not a significant difference between the students' professional status scores according to their class levels while professional qualities scores of 4th grade students was higher than those of 3rd grade students and this difference was statistically significant. Together with the recognition that vocational education is a process that prepares individuals for the profession and that the students do not have sufficient professional experience in the first years of their education, it is expected that both their socialization levels and professional perceptions change within the process (Brodie *et al.*, 2004; Oner Altiok, 2016). In the study conducted by Dinc et al. (2007), when the current views of nursing students about nursing profession was examined, the increase in

the 3rd and 4th grade students' positive views were found to be significant (Dinc, Kaya and Simsek, 2007). In the study conducted by Kızgut and Ergol (2011), more than half of the 4th grade students expressed a positive change in their nursing profession perceptions. The students were mostly focused on medical and technical nursing roles but 4th grade students expressed nursing roles of protecting and improving health more than the 1st graders (Kızgut and Ergol, 2011). However, there are also different study results in the literature. In the study by Andersson in 1993, it was found that nursing students perceived nursing in the traditional context and these perceptions were stable during their education, about one third of them developed a new self-concept and perspective but the traditional nursing image continued (Andersson, 1993). Grainger and Bolan (2006) revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the nursing images of the 1st and 4th grade students (Grainger and Bolan, 2006). Similarly, Zhang and Petrini (2008) reported that the demographic characteristics of the students were not related to their attitudes towards nursing and that clinical experience had no effect on professional perceptions of nursing students (Zhang and Petrini, 2008). In the study by Denat et al. (2016), it was found that there was no significant change in the professional perception and professional status scores of the students during their education but similar to our findings, there was a significant change in their professional qualities subscale scores (Denat, Gurol Arslan and Sahbaz, 2016). In the study conducted by Eser et al. (2008), it was revealed that there was no significant change in nursing students' professional perception and professional status scores before and after the first clinical application but there was a significant change in their professional qualities scores (Eser, Khorshid and Denat, 2008). It is thought that these differences in the literature may stem from the curriculum used in nursing education. Nursing curriculum plays an important role in shaping the students' attitudes towards nursing profession and professional perceptions, and contributing to their professional development (Manninen, 1998; Zhang and Petrini, 2008; Nilsson and Silén, 2010).

In this study, it was revealed that there was not a significant difference between professional status scores according to gender while female students had significantly higher professional perception and professional qualities scores than male students. In the study conducted by Safadi et al (2011), it was found that nursing perception scores of female students were significantly higher than those of male students (Safadi *et al.*, 2011). In the qualitative study by Wang et al. (2011) conducted to examine the perceptions of male nursing students regarding nursing profession, it was found that nursing perceptions of male students were generally negative (Wang *et al.*, 2011). Male students considered that working nurses had low educational levels and that the level of practice and research in nursing profession was lower than that of doctors. Our results support the previous study findings in the literature.

In the study, the fact that the students regarded the nurses as well equipped in terms of theoretical and clinical knowledge that the students considered nurses as they fulfilled the requirements of nursing profession, and that they regarded the nurses as supportive/helpful positively affected the students' professional perceptions. In the study conducted by Andersson (1993), the students defined professional nursing as a "consequence of competence" (Andersson, 1993). In the study by Bijani et al. (2017) conducted with nurses, nursing students and nursing instructors, the participants determined that sustaining the competence in the field of practice was the priority (Bijani, Tehranineshat and Torabizadeh, 2017). Brodie et al. (2004) revealed that the students perceived nursing as a profession practicing independently and requiring autonomy. The students stated that there was a mismatch between the caregiving philosophy of nursing and the lack of support they perceived during clinical practice (Brodie *et al.*, 2004). Since nursing students may experience anxiety and stress during nursing education, it is important to provide nursing students social support and faculty support in addition to clinical support they needed (Brodie *et al.*, 2004; Yearwood and Riley, 2010; Reeve *et al.*, 2013). The students with successful mentoring relationships have higher satisfaction levels (Papastavrou *et al.*, 2010).

In our study, it was found that professional perceptions of the students who were appreciated by the nurses and who regarded the nurses as role models during the clinical applications were high. As students observe nurses (mentors) and imitate what they do, mentors/nurses are also role models for students (Koontz *et al.*, 2010; Setati

and Nkosi, 2017). Feeling appreciated by the team compensates for some of the other incompetency of the students and allows them to participate actively in the setting (Nolan, 1998). The fact that nursing students meet positive role models strengthens their beliefs that nursing is a distinguished profession (Emeghebo, 2012). It is important that nursing students have good role models in order to strengthen their moral development and build a strong professional identity (Sabatino *et al.*, 2015). The study by Sabatino et al. (2015) revealed that positive role models and supportive working environment are two important conceptual areas for nursing students to develop strong respect for the ethical values of the profession and that the positive behaviors of nurses strengthens the respect of the students towards the profession (Sabatino *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer (2006) found in their study that role models affected the nursing perceptions of the students (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). The concepts such as appreciating students and supporting them, which are related to team-student relationship, have impact on the students' sense of belonging and their learning (Levett-Jones *et al.*, 2009). For this reason, it is extremely important that the skills of student nurses in clinical applications are supported and appreciated by the nurses and that supportive working environment is provided to student nurses.

Being a member of any association related to the profession is another factor affecting professional perception. In this study, it was found that the students considering being a member of any professional association when they started the profession had a high professional perception. Similarly, in the study conducted by Donmez and Ozsoy (2016), it was found that nursing students who were the members of professional associations had stronger professional values (Donmez and Ozsoy, 2016). It is possible to find different research results in the literature. In the study by Bijani et al. (2017) conducted with nurses, nursing students and nursing instructors to compare the professional value perceptions in nursing, it was found that of the items related to activism, the most significant item was the development of profession through active participation in health care policies, while the least significant item was the participation in association activities related to the nursing profession (Bijani, Tehranineshat and

Torabizadeh, 2017). Similarly, Chisholm-Ford et al. (2017) found that participating in the activities of student nurses association was the lowest significant value associated with activism (Chisholm-Ford *et al.*, 2017). The cultural differences of the participants and the differences in the measurement tools used in data collection may have been effective on this conflict.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As a result of this research, it was concluded that having education in a higher class, being female, considering being a member of any professional association when they began to work, considering that the behaviors of the nurses during clinical applications had a positive impact on their perceiving profession, feeling being appreciated by the nurses during their clinical applications, and regarding the nurses as their role models had a positive effect on the professional perceptions of nursing students.

In accordance with these results, trainings should be organized for nurses regarding the importance of their roles in student education. Rewarding taking charge in this education and organizing the application settings so that they support the students is crucial in terms of motivating the students (for example; providing space for students in the clinics to enable them to rest, come together, read files, and organize meetings). Furthermore, qualitative researches are also recommended regarding the impact of nurses on the students' professional perceptions.

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