Original Article

The Professional Image Perceptions of Nursing Students and Nurses: Descriptive, Cross-Sectional Study

Meryem Yilmaz, PhD
Professor at the Department of Surgical Nursing, Nursing Division, Faculty of Health Sciences, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey

Ayse Topal Hancer, PhD
Research Assistant, Department of Surgical Nursing, Nursing Division, Faculty of Health Sciences, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey

Pinar Yilmaz Eker, PhD
Assistant Professor, Nursing Division, SuSehri High School of Health, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey

Kubra Erturhan Turk, PhD
Research Assistant, Department of Surgical Nursing, Nursing Division, Faculty of Health Sciences, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey

Correspondence: Meryem Yilmaz, PhD, Professor, Department of Surgical Nursing, Nursing Division, Faculty of Health Sciences, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey
E-mail: yilmazmm01@hotmail.com

Abstract

Objective: This study was conducted with the aim of determining the professional image perceptions of nursing students and nurses, as well as the factors influencing them.

Material-Methods: This is a descriptive, and cross-sectional study. The population of the study consisted of senior-year nursing from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, and nurses working in a university hospital. The sample consisted of nursing students and nurses who were continuing their education or employment, and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Data were collected with a questionnaire and the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession (ISNP). The results were analyzed using the descriptive tests, Z test, and KW analysis.

Results: A total of 326 adults participated in this study: 150 working nurses and 176 senior nursing students. The perceptions of nurses and nursing students regarding the image of nursing were at a good level but, the ISNP total score of students was found to be significantly higher than nurses. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between nurses' and students' ISPN's working conditions, occupational status, and the total score (p<0.05). It has been revealed that students and nurses perceive the public nursing image at a moderate level.

Conclusion: In this study, it was determined that the perceptions of nursing students and nurses about the image of nursing were at a good level.

Key Words: Image, professional image, nursing image, public image of nursing

Introduction

The concept of nursing image is multifaceted, encompassing different dimensions such as complexity, dynamism, and paradox (Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012). Despite nursing's longstanding recognition as an emerging profession, its image has not undergone rapid transformation, and challenges such as stereotypes and virtue scenarios persist in certain regions (Koo & Lin, 2016). At the turn of the 21st century, discussions about the professionalization of nursing and its image continue worldwide, underscoring their profound influence on nurses' professional identities and

perceptions (ten Hoeve et al., 2014). Moreover, these perceptions and identities are shaped by a variety of factors, including tradition, culture, society, and socioeconomic status.

Based on contemporary understandings, nursing adopts two distinct approaches in representing itself as a discipline. The "knowledge approach" emphasizes evidence-based practice, basic scientific knowledge, and skills to enhance nursing's professional standing and combat stereotypes (Bliss et al., 2017; Gordon & Nelson, 2005). This perspective advocates moving away from the traditional "virtue scenario (Fealy & McNamara, 2015). Conversely, the "caring relationship" approach emphasizes a humanistic view that focuses on compassion and empathy. However, debates continue about the precise form and content of nursing knowledge within this framework (Fealy & McNamara, 2015).

In recent years, nurses have achieved a high level of professionalism through extensive research and the establishment of nursing protocols and guidelines (ten Hoeve et al., 2015). Despite these advances, nursing continues to struggle with a relatively low public status. While nurses demonstrate expertise and competence, their professional identity remains under-recognized (Park et al., 2019). Negative stereotypes about nursing persist in public perception, with these biases often taking root before individuals begin their educational journey and persisting throughout their nursing education (Martínez-Morato et al., 2021; López-Verdugo et al., 2021). Unfortunately, stereotypes are resistant to change and persist even after extensive education (Kammer & Ewers, 2021).

The image of a profession includes its perception by other disciplines and the general public, including consumers of its services. Similarly, nurses' perceptions of their profession and its public image are critical. Nursing's image has a profound effect on career perceptions, attitudes, professionalism, and role performance (Abdelrahman, 2018).

In addition, the public image of nursing significantly influences students' career decisions, funding for nursing education and research, relationships with health care administrators and professionals, and interactions with government agencies and legislators. However, despite its importance, a previous review study highlighted the lack of systematic and consistent data on the concept of nursing image, its importance to the profession, its influencing factors, and its impact. This study identified four dimensions of the nursing image:

1. Public perception of nursing.

2. The individual and collective image perceived by nurses (including nursing students and practicing nurses) based on professional values that reflect nurses' self-image or professional identity.

3. Nurses' perceptions of the public image of nursing.

4. The portrayal of nursing in the media or its representation through media channels.

Questions of the Study

1. What is the professional image of nurses?

2. What characterizes the professional image of senior nursing students?

3. What factors contribute to the professional image of both nurses and nursing students?

Material and Methods

Study Design and Participants: A descriptive, and cross-sectional design was used in this study. A total of 176 volunteer senior-year nursing students and 150 volunteer nurses participated in the survey. The research was conducted at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, and Hospital of a university located in Central Anatolia/Turkiye. Participants in this study included senior nursing students from a university nursing department and nurses employed in the university hospital.

Data Collection Tools:

The Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed to determine the characteristics of nurses and students. The questionnaire form for nurses consisted of 10 questions: (1) age, (2) gender, (3) marital status, (4) educational status, (5) whether there is a nurse in the family, (6) the clinic where she worked, (7) willingness, (8) which university he graduated from, (9) whether she is considering changing the profession, and (10) the social image of nursing. The student questionnaire consisted of 9 questions: (1) age, (2) gender, (3) marital status, (4) whether there was a nurse in the family, (5) willingness to choose nursing specialty, (6) contemplation of changing the specialty, (7) intention to practice nursing after graduation, (8). institution where they study, (9) perception of the social image of nursing

Image Scale for Nursing Profession (ISNP): The scale used in the study was developed by Dost & Bahcecik (2015). It consists of 42 items divided into six sub-dimensions: (a) professional qualifications in nursing (items 1-11), (b) working conditions (items 12-21), (c) gender (items 22-29), (d) education (items 30-34), (e) status (items 35-39), (f) external (items 40-42). The scale is 5-point Likert type. In the scale, items 8, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29 and 31 are evaluated negatively. Higher scores on the scale indicate a more positive perception of the nursing profession. The possible scores range from 42 to 210. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.88 in its original development. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.74.

Data Collection: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Research data were collected using a questionnaire form developed by the researchers and the Image Scale for Nursing Profession (ISNP). These forms were administered through face-to-face interviews conducted by the researchers. For nurses, the interviews were conducted in the clinic where they worked, while for students, the interviews were conducted in the classroom. The administration of the forms was completed within 20-25 minutes.

Statistical Analyses: Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Normality of data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Kurtosis and Skewness values. Categorical variables were presented as numbers with percentages and analyzed accordingly. Chi-squared test and Kruskal-Wallis One-Way analysis of variance were used to compare means between groups. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses.

Ethical considerations: The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Sivas Cumhuriyet University (reference number 2017-10/07). Prior to participation, all participants were verbally informed of the objectives of the study. The tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Both students and nurses participated in the study on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Results

Sample characteristics

The mean age of the nurses was 30.47 years (SD=7.44; range: 19-58). The demographic characteristics of the nurses are shown in Table 1. The nurses were predominantly employed in surgical clinics, and the majority did not have a family member who was a nurse. Approximately 57.3% of the nurses chose nursing by choice, while 50% were considering a career change. In addition, 54.7% of the nurses perceived the social status of nursing as moderate.

Analysis of scores on the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession (ISNP) showed that female nurses, those who were married, those who worked in internal medicine clinics, those who had a family member in the nursing profession, and those who voluntarily pursued nursing education tended to have higher scores. However, these differences were not statistically significant (p>0.05). Conversely, significant differences were observed for education level, consideration of changing

the nursing profession, perception of the public image of nursing, and professional image scores (p<0.05). Specifically, nurses with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, those who did not intend to change their profession, and those who perceived a positive public image of nursing had higher scores (Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, the mean age of the nursing students is 22.33 years (SD=1.40). Among the students, 80.1% are female and all are single. In addition, 76.1% do not have a family member who is a nurse. In addition, 86.9% intend to pursue a career as a nurse after graduation, with 57.4% having chosen the nursing profession voluntarily. It was found that 72.2% of the students expressed no intention to change their career path, while 59.7% rated the public image of the nursing profession as moderate. In addition, mean ISNP scores were higher among female students and those with a nurse in the family, although these differences were not statistically significant (p>0.05). Conversely, individuals who expressed an intention to work as a nurse and those who willingly chose the nursing profession had statistically significantly higher mean scores (p<0.05). In addition, a statistically significant disparity was observed between the consideration of a career change and the perception of the public image of the nursing profession and the mean ISNP score (p<0.001). This variance was attributed to individuals who did not plan to change careers and those who perceived the public image of the profession to be positive. Conversely, there were no statistically significant differences between nurses and students in ISNP scores for the sub-dimensions of professional qualifications and appearance, gender, and level of education (p>0.05). However, working conditions (p=0.000), professional status (p=0.002), and total ISNP scores were significantly higher for students than for nurses (p=0.001).

The ISNP scores of the nurses and students Table 3 shows that both nurses and students (M=144.03±9.87) and students (M=147.06±12.98) had a good level of professional image perception. In addition, the mean total ISPN scores of students exceeded those of nurses, and this difference between the mean scores of students and nurses was statistically significant.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that both nurses and nursing students have good professional image perceptions, with students having significantly higher ISNP total scores than nurses in the study population. These findings are consistent with previous research (Yilmaz et al., 2019; Yilmaz, 2019; Ozdelikara et al., 2015; Karaman et al., 2020; Apaydin Cirik et al., 2022; Efil et al., 2022) indicating that the professional image of nursing students tends to be good or moderate (Kizilcik-Ozkan et al., 2017; Dost & Bahcecik, 2022). However, contrasting results have been reported in studies of nurses, where the image of nursing was perceived as poor (Maliheh et al., 2020) or moderate (Sezer et al., 2017), and both nurses' self-image and public perception of nursing were negative (Abdelrahman, 2018).

One possible explanation for these discrepancies may be the social roles traditionally assigned to men and women in regions where patriarchal social systems prevail. Such cultural norms may influence perceptions of nursing as a profession, potentially affecting nurses' self-image and the public's perception of the profession. Indeed, the image of the profession plays a significant role in influencing individuals' decisions to pursue nursing as a career, to remain in the profession, and to recommend it to others (Abdelrahman, 2018; Sezer ve Kristoffersen, 2021). Studies (Kandil et al., 2021; Ozmen & Cetinkaya, 2016; Baskale & Sercekus, 2015) have identified the image of nursing as a primary factor influencing students' preferences for nursing education. Consequently, inaccurate perceptions of the nursing profession can have a negative impact on

recruitment, resource allocation, and the overall perception of nursing professionalism.

However, deficiencies in social recognition and professional autonomy, as well as perceptions related to working conditions, may contribute to negative perceptions of the nursing profession among both nurses and students. Recent research (Godsey et al., 2020) has identified several factors that contribute to the inconsistent image of nursing, including diversity in education and professional identity, lack of

prioritization of image management, inadequate leadership development, lack of professionalism, media and online portrayals, personal patient experiences, interactions with other professionals, and gender role assumptions. Addressing these factors is essential to improving the overall image of the nursing profession and attracting and retaining qualified individuals to the field.

The study found that nurses scored lower than students on the ISNP working conditions sub-dimension. Students may have positive perceptions of nursing due to the focus of education on current scientific knowledge. Previous research in Poland (Marcinowicz et al., 2016) and elsewhere supports students' belief in improving the image of nursing. Societal factors, educational norms, and the nursing education system influence students' perceptions. Institutional culture can shape the views of nursing students, although their voluntary choice of the profession usually leads to a strong professional identity (Baskale & Sercekus, 2015; Marcinowicz et al., 2019). However, workplace practices, often rooted in tradition, can influence the early experiences and perceptions of new nurses. The study found that nurses scored significantly lower than students on the ISNP working conditions sub-dimension. Students' positive perceptions of nursing may result from education based on current scientific knowledge. Previous research in Poland (Marcinowicz et al., 2016) and elsewhere showed that students were aware

of nursing's poor image but believed in its potential for improvement. Similarly, one study (Baskale & Sercekus, 2015) documented positive perceptions among students who viewed nursing as an essential, respected, and compassionate profession serving the public. Societal factors, educational traditions, and the nursing education system shape students' perceptions of the nursing profession (Marcinowicz et al., 2019). These findings suggest that workplace culture may influence perceptions of nursing formed during education. Nursing students acquire scientific knowledge, skills, and professional values during their undergraduate education that contribute to a strong professional identity if they choose the profession voluntarily. However, the institutional culture of nursing workplaces can have a positive or negative impact on education. Routine studies in health care institutions underscore the importance of traditional workplace routines for new graduates, particularly those enforced by nursing staff.

In our study, 27.8% of students and half of nurses expressed a desire to change careers, reflecting a global concern about nurses' intentions to leave the profession (de Oliveira, et al., 2019). Previous research (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2017) supports these findings: 59.3% of nurses would change jobs for better opportunities, while 15.4% considered leaving the profession altogether and 40.6% would not choose nursing if given the chance. Another study (Haydari et al., 2016) found that 57.6% of nurses expressed a high intention to leave their current job, with 55.9% intending to leave the profession. Contributing factors include heavy workloads, low financial incentives, and negative perceptions of the profession's working conditions. Addressing these concerns is consistent with the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) recommendations for redesigning the healthcare delivery system and increasing the leadership role of nurses (Institute of Medicine, 2010).

Table 1. Comparison of some characteristics of nurses and their nursing image average scores

Characteristics	Nurses (n=150)			Test	p
	n	**%**	**Mean (SD)**	**Test**	**p**
Age (Mean (SD)			30.47(7.44)		
Sex					
Female	114	76	144.18(10.10)	Z=-0.137	0.891
Male	36	24	143.58(9.19)		
Marital status					
Married	83	55.3	144.31(10.61)	Z=-0.028	0.977
Single	66	44.7	143.69(8.92)		
Education					
High school	24	16	140.33(9.94)	KW=7.590	**0.022**
University (Undergraduate)	100	66.7	143.65(8.88)	Fark=2-3>1	
Post Graduate	26	17.3	148.92(11.76)		
Clinics where she/he works					
Internal medicine	45	30	145.89(10.17)	Z=-1.843	0.065
Surgery	105	70	143.24(9.68)		
Nurse in family					
Yes	52	34.7	144.79(10.26)	Z=-0.589	0.556
No	98	65.3	143.63(9.68)		
Nursing profession					
Willingly choose	86	57.3	144.95(9.76)	Z=-1.091	0.275
Unwillingly chose	64	42.7	142.80(9.95)		
Wanting to change the nursing profession					
Yes	75	50	140.80(8.41)	Z=-3.762	**0.000**
No	75	50	147.27(10.21)		
Public image of the nursing					
Low	66	44	140.64(8.38)	KW=15.473	**0.000**
Medium	82	54.7	146.54(10.24)		
High	2	1.3	153.50(0.71)		

Table 2. Comparison of some characteristics of students and their nursing image average scores

Characteristics	Nursing students (n=176)			Test	p
	n	**%**	**Mean (SD)**	**Test**	**p**
Age average			22.33 (1.40)		
Sex					
Female	141	80.1	148.74(11.49)	Z=-3.137	0.002
Male	35	19.9	140.29(16.28)		
Marrital status					
Married	-	-	-	-	-

Single	176	100	-		
Nurse in family					
Yes	42	23.9	150.05(12.03)	Z=-1.410	0.159
No	134	76.1	146.13(13.17)		
Who want to work as a nurse					
Yes	153	86.9	148.29(12.49)	Z=-3.061	**0.002**
No	23	13.1	138.91(13.57)		
Nursing profession					
Willingly choose	101	57.4	148.64(10.33)	Z=-2.094	**0.036**
Unwillingly chose	75	42.6	144.93(15.87)		
Wanting to change the nursing profession					
Yes	49	27.8	140.65(16.13)	Z=-3.684	**0.000**
No	127	72.2	149.54(10.62)		
Public image of the nursing					
Low	66	37.5	141.67(15.72)	KW=22.731	**0.000**
Medium	105	59.7	149.80(9.59)		
High	5	2.8	160.80(7.60)		

Table 3. Comparison of nursing image mean scores of nurses and students

ISPN sub-dimension	Scale Min-max	Nurse Min-max	Student Min-max	Nurse Mean (SD)	Student Mean (SD)	Z	p
Professional qualifications	11-55	26-51	21-51	46.7 (4.74)	46.9 (5.13)	-0.839	0.401
Working conditions	10-50	14-32	18-73	24.9 (3.02)	26.5 (4.50)	-4.147	**0.000**
Gender	8-40	12-36	12-36	26.7 (4.47)	26.5 (4.72)	-0.105	0.916
Education	5-25	14-25	6-25	19.9 (2.01)	19.9 (2.20)	-0.330	0.742
Professional status	5-25	5-25	5-25	15.0 (4.25)	16.6 (4.83)	-3.167	**0.002**
Appearance	3-15	3-15	3-15	10.7 (2.50)	10.7 (2.83)	-0.404	0.686
Total	42-210	126-187	79-196	144.0 (9.87)	147.1 (12.98)	-3.261	**0.001**

Min: Minimum, Max Maksimum, SD: Standart Deviation, ISPN: Image Scale for Nursing Profession

The current findings indicate that the ISNP total score was higher for nurses and students who voluntarily chose nursing, with significant differences observed in the scores of students (p<0.05), while the difference between the scores of nurses was not significant (p>0.05). Similarly, a study (Zencir, 2016) showed that more than half of the students chose nursing voluntarily and had a positive attitude towards the profession. Voluntary choice of a profession is crucial for fostering positive image perceptions. However, image and perception are multifaceted concepts that are influenced not only by voluntary career choice but also by various factors, including stereotypes perpetuated by a physician-dominated health care system. Recent research (López-Verdugo et al., 2021) has shown that the public has misconceptions and stereotypes about the roles and functions of nurses. The study found that nurses with undergraduate and graduate education had higher image perceptions. This may be due to the "knowledge approach," which increases nurses' visibility and awareness of their professional roles, authority, and legal responsibilities. Consequently, appointing nurses with advanced degrees as clinical

educators could enhance the visibility and public image of the profession. This could address the persistent gap between nursing law and nursing education and promote nursing as an epistemically strong discipline. Promotion of nursing's academic identity within health care institutions by organizations such as the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and health care legislators could further underscore the critical role of well-trained nurses in patient care and recovery, and ultimately increase societal awareness of their indispensable contribution.

In our study, both students and nurses with family members in the nursing profession, as well as female nurses, had higher ISNP total scores. This is consistent with previous research (Zencir, 2016) indicating that individuals with a family member who is a nurse tend to have a more positive perception of nursing. The image of nursing is influenced by several factors, including public perception, societal norms, media portrayal, personal experiences with nurses, family ties to nursing, physician-nurse dynamics, risk of violence, and exposure to occupational hazards. The elevated ISNP scores among female participants may be attributed to the historical association of nursing with femininity, given the predominance of female nurses and students in the field.

In the current study, it was determined that more than half of both nurses and students perceived the public image of nursing to be at a moderate level. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Yilmaz et al., 2019; Sis Celik et al., 2013) that also reported moderate perceptions of nursing's image. However, in the study conducted by Abdelrahman, the public image of nursing was found to be negative. Cukljek et al. suggest that despite the rapid developments towards professionalization in nursing, there are still problems related to the nursing perception of the public and the demonstration of nurses' contribution to patient care, and prejudice against the profession

Limitations of the study: It's important to place these findings in the context of the study's limitations. First, the data relied solely on self-report measures from nurses and students. Second, the study sample was limited to a single center.

Conclusion: The study found that both nurses and senior nursing students had positive perceptions of the professional image, but the students' scores were significantly higher than those of the nurses. In addition, both groups rated the public image of nursing as moderate. Participants who chose nursing by choice, had a nurse in their family, lacked formal education, or had higher education had higher image perceptions. However, a significant proportion of participants expressed a desire to leave the profession if given the opportunity. The persistent global problem of nursing image requires robust, evidence-based solutions.

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