Original Article

Work Expectations, Economic Constraints, Decent Work Perceptions, and Personality Traits: A Cross-Sectional Study among Undergraduate Nursing Students

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Abstract
Objective: This study aimed to examine nursing students' professional thoughts, their perceptions of economic constraints, and their evaluations of decent work, as well as to analyze the relationships among these variables.
Methods: A descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted with 74 undergraduate students enrolled in a state university in u during the spring semester of 2025. Data were collected using a demographic form, the Work Expectations Questionnaire (WEQ), the Economic Constraints Scale (EKO), the Decent Work Scale (DWS), and the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI). Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0.
Results: The internal consistency of the scales ranged from acceptable to excellent (α = .74–.92). Correlation analysis showed a negative relationship between WEQ and EKO ($r = –0.459$, $p < .001$) and a positive relationship between WEQ and TIPI ($r = 0.324$, $p = .005$). Regression analyses indicated that EKO significantly predicted WEQ ($\beta = –0.116$, $p = .001$), while TIPI was the only significant predictor of DWS ($\beta = 0.422$, $p = .004$).
Conclusion: Students' work expectations are shaped not only by socioeconomic conditions but also by personality traits and perceptions of decent work. Expanding financial support mechanisms and promoting decent work conditions may enhance students' motivation, identity development, and long-term commitment to their profession.

Keywords: Work expectations; Economic constraints; Decent work; Personality traits; Undergraduate students

Introduction

Nursing plays a fundamental role in maintaining, developing, and sustaining the health levels of individuals and communities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the increasing burden of chronic diseases, the shortage of healthcare workers, and transformations in healthcare services have made the nursing profession more critical than ever (World Health Organization, 2021). Nurses are not only care providers but also educators, consultants, and key actors in the sustainability of health systems.

Nurses' commitment to their profession and their professional identity development are largely shaped by the perceptions and attitudes they form during their student years (Sabancciıogullari & Dogan, 2015; Karaoz, 2013; Kantek, Kaya, & Gezer, 2017). Therefore, examining students' expectations and perceptions related to their profession is important not only for enhancing the quality of educational outcomes but also for directly influencing future healthcare workforce planning (Ozkan & Uydaci, 2020).

Career choice is one of the most critical factors determining the future motivation and

commitment of nursing students. In the literature, it is stated that students who choose the profession willingly have stronger job satisfaction and professional identity development, while those who choose it for reasons such as necessity or job security have weaker connections to ithe profession (Turk, Adana, Erol, Cevik Akyil, & Taskiran, 2018; Karaoz, 2013; McLaughlin, Moutray, & Muldoon, 2008; Newton et al., 2009). Additionally, the social prestige of nursing, employment opportunities, job security, and the female-dominated nature of the profession also influence career choices (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2015).

Economic status is another important variable shaping students' career pathways. For socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, nursing is an appealing option due to its promise of stable income and job security. However, students who choose the profession for purely economic reasons may experience lower levels of voluntary engagement and professional commitment (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Kim et al. (2023) also noted that economic constraints limit young adults' career opportunities and reduce job satisfaction. Research in Turkiye has demonstrated that family income and living standards significantly influence career decisions and educational participation (Ozkan & Uydaci, 2020).

On the other hand, the concept of decent work provides a contemporary framework for evaluating professions. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work encompasses secure working conditions, fair wages, social protection, free time, opportunities for personal development, and alignment with societal values (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019). Students who positively perceive these dimensions are more likely to develop stronger professional identity and commitment, and to continue in their chosen profession in the future (Van der Heide et al., 2018).

In the Turkish context, the nursing profession holds a strategic role in addressing the healthcare workforce gap (Ozkan & Uydaci 2020; WHO, 2021). Nevertheless, some students do not enter the profession voluntarily, being influenced instead by economic, social, or gender-related factors, and may even consider leaving the profession at a later stage. This situation directly affects both the sustainability of healthcare services and the quality of nursing education outcomes (Karaoz, 2013).

Accordingly, this study examines the reasons behind students' career choices, their work expectations, economic constraints, and perceptions of decent work, along with the role of personality traits. By integrating these perspectives, the study aims to provide insights into student motivation, professional development, and strategies to make the profession more attractive.

Methodology

Research Design: This study was conducted using a descriptive and cross-sectional design to explore students' work expectations, perceptions of economic constraints, and evaluations of decent work, as well as the role of personality traits.

Population and Sample: The study population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in a state university during the 2024–2025 academic year. A total of 74 students voluntarily participated in the study. The sample was based on voluntary participation, and no random sampling procedure was applied.

Instruments

Data were collected using four instruments:

1. Work Expectations Questionnaire (WEQ).

A 10-item questionnaire developed to assess students' economic security concerns and work-related expectations (e.g., concerns about unexpected expenses, ability to save for the future, expectations for fair wages, safe working conditions, social prestige, career advancement, and work–life balance). Items were rated dichotomously (1 = Yes, 2 = No). The internal consistency for this study was acceptable (Cronbach's α = .739 after item revision).

2. Economic Constraints Scale (EKO).

A 5-item Likert-type scale measuring perceived economic hardship and limitations, originally developed within the framework of the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016). Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7

(Strongly Agree). In this study, the scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .921).

3. Decent Work Scale (DWS).

A 15-item scale assessing perceptions of decent work, grounded in the International Labour Organization's conceptualization of decent work (ILO, 2019) and adapted to the Turkish context by Buyukgoze-Kavas and Autin (2019). Items cover job security, fair wages, safe conditions, social protection, and work–life balance. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. After reverse coding of negatively worded items, the scale showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .766).

4. Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI).

A brief instrument measuring the Big Five personality traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience. The TIPI was originally developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003). Items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, with reverse coding applied to negatively worded items. The internal consistency coefficient in this study was acceptable (Cronbach's α = .774).

Data Collection Procedure: Data were collected during the spring semester of 2025 using a self-administered questionnaire. Participants completed the forms either in classrooms or through online distribution channels. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores) were calculated for demographic variables and all scales. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were used to assess reliability. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine group differences by gender and income. Pearson correlation analyses were used to test associations among WEQ, EKO, DWS, and TIPI. Multiple regression analyses were performed to identify predictors of work expectations, economic constraints, and decent work perceptions. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Ethical Approval: This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Bursa Uludag University (Ethics Committee Approval no: 2025-692/10-23). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. Participants' personal information was kept confidential, and anonymity was ensured.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the study included 74 participants aged between 18 and 25 years, with a mean age of 20.9 (SD = 1.39). The majority of the participants were female (82.4%, n = 61), while 17.6% (n = 13) were male. Regarding monthly income, most students reported that their income was higher than their expenses (77%, n = 57), whereas 12.2% (n = 9) indicated income equal to expenses, and 10.8% (n = 8) reported expenses exceeding their income.

With respect to the scales, the mean score for WEQ (Work Expectations Questionnaire) was 11.03 (SD = 1.97, range = 8–16). The mean score for EKO (Economic Constraints) was 14.0 (SD = 6.30, range = 5–33). For DWS (Decent Work Scale), the mean score was 67.19 (SD = 9.38, range = 41–93). Finally, the mean score for TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory) was 50.43 (SD = 8.03, range = 35–68).

Reliability of the Scales. Cronbach's Alpha values indicated acceptable internal consistency for all instruments WEQ (α = .739), EKO (α = .921), DWS (α = .766) and TIPI (0.774)(Table 2).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant associations among the study variables (Table 3). TIPI was negatively correlated with EKO ($r = –0.459$, $p < .001$) and positively correlated with TIPI ($r = 0.324$, $p = .005$). EKO was also negatively correlated with TIPI ($r = –0.314$, $p = .006$), while DWS showed a positive correlation with TIPI ($r = 0.350$, $p = .002$). In contrast, TIPI –DWS ($r = 0.115$, $p = .331$) and EKO– DWS ($r = –0.073$, $p = .539$) relationships were not significant.

Table 4 presents scale scores by gender and income groups. For gender, only DWS showed a significant difference, with male students reporting higher scores than females (71.92 vs. 66.18, $p = .049$**).** WEQ**,** EKO, and TIPI scores did not differ significantly by gender.

For income groups, no significant differences were found for WEQ or EKO scores. However, DWS scores differed significantly across groups (F = 5.465, p = .006), with the "income < expenses" group scoring the highest (76.88). Similarly, TIPI scores varied significantly by income (F = 3.215, p = .046), again with the "income < expenses" group reporting the highest values (57.00).

Table 5 presents the item-level correlations between WEQ items and the three main scales. Most WEQ items showed significant negative correlations with EKO, particularly WEQ-3 (r = –0.457, p < .001), WEQ-4 (r = –0.580, p < .001), and WEQ-5 (r = –0.491, p < .001), indicating that higher economic constraints were associated with weaker work expectations.

In contrast, several WEQ items were positively associated with TIPI, including WEQ-1 (r = 0.433, p < .001), WEQ-3 (r = 0.295, p = .011), WEQ-5 (r = 0.346, p = .003), and WEQ-10 (r = 0.310, p = .009), suggesting that stronger personality traits were linked to higher work expectations.

Correlations between WEQ items and DWS were generally weak and non-significant, except for WEQ-1 (r = 0.290, p = .012), which indicated that students with stronger expectations about financial security also perceived higher levels of decent work.

Overall, the findings highlight that WEQ are negatively influenced by EKO and positively associated with TIPI, while their association with decent work perceptions DWS remains limited.

As shown in Table 6, the regression model for WEQ was significant (R^2 = 0.238, F = 7.280, p < .001). Among the predictors, only EKO was a significant negative predictor (β = –0.116, p = .001), while DWS and TIPI were not significant.

For EKO, the model was also significant (R^2 = 0.229, F = 6.937, p < .001). WEQ emerged as a strong negative predictor (β = –1.231, p = .001), whereas DWS and TIPI were not significant predictors.

For DWS, the model explained 12% of the variance (R^2 = 0.124, F = 3.297, p = .025). In this model, only TIPI significantly predicted DWS (β = 0.422, p = .004), while WEQ and EKO were non-significant.

Overall, the results indicate a reciprocal negative relationship between WEQ and EKO, and emphasize the unique positive role of TIPI in predicting DWS.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	**n**	**%**	**Min-Max (Mean ± SD)**
Age (Mean ± SD)			18-25 **(20.9 ± 1.39)**
Gender			
Female	61	82.4	
Male	13	17.6	
Monthly Income			
Income higher than expenses	57	77	
ncome equal to expenses	9	12.2	
Expenses higher than income	8	10.8	

WEQ(Work Expectations Questionnaire)			**8-16(11.03±** 1.97)
EKO (Economic Constraints)			**5-33(14±6.30)**
DWS (Decent Work)			41-93(67.19± 9.38)
TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory)			35-68(50.43 ± **8.03)**

Table2: Reliability Summary of Scales (Cronbach's α)

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
WEQ (Work Expectations Questionnaire)	10	0.739
EKO (Economic Constraints)	5	0.921
DWS (Decent Work)	15	0.766
TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory)	10	0.774

Note. Cronbach's Alpha values ≥ .70 indicate acceptable, ≥ .80 good, and ≥ .90 excellent reliability (Field, 2018).

Table 3. Correlations among WEQ, EKO, DWS, and TIPI Total Scores

	1	2	3	4
1. **WEQ _** TOTAL	1	r = –0.459, **p < .001**	r = 0.115, p = .331	r = 0.324, **p = .005**
2. EKO_ TOTAL		1	r = –0.073, p = .539	r = –0.314, **p = .00**
3. DWS_ TOTAL			1	r = 0.350, **p = .002**
4.TIPI _ TOTAL				1

Note. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. p < .05 indicates statistical significance.

Table 4. Scale Scores by Gender and Income Groups

Scale	**Female Mean**	**Male Mean**	**Mean (Income < Exp)**	**Mean (Income = Exp**	**Mean (Income > Exp)**	**F / t**	**p-value**
WEQ _total	10.98	11.23	11.88	10.93	10.89	0.827	.442
EKO_total	13.61	16.69	11.88	14.21	15.78	0.819	.445

DWS_total	66.18	71.92	76.88	65.82	67.22	5.465	**.006**
TIPI_total	50.11	51.92	57.00	49.74	49.00	3.215	**.046**

Note. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare mean differences across income groups. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

Table 5. Correlations between MIS Items and EKO, DWS, TIPI

WEQ Item	**EKO (r, p)**	**DWS (r, p)**	**TIPI (r, p)**
WEQ -1	**–0.381, .001** **	**0.290, .012** **	**0.433, <.001** **
WEQ -2	–0.208, .075	0.014, .903	0.158, .179
WEQ -3	**–0.457, <.001** **	0.150, .203	**0.295, .011** **
WEQ -4	**–0.580, <.001** **	0.132, .263	**0.263, .024** **
WEQ -5	**–0.491, <.001** **	0.146, .214	**0.346, .003** **
WEQ -6	**–0.310, .007** **	–0.074, .532	**0.240, .038** **
WEQ -7	–0.186, .111	–0.152, .195	**0.275, .020** **
WEQ -8	**–0.262, .024** **	–0.225, .054	0.195, .098
WEQ -9	–0.145, .217	–0.137, .246	**0.280, .017** **
WEQ -10	–0.120, .308	0.060, .609	**0.310, .009** **

Note. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance (bolded).

Table 6. Multiple Regression Results (WEQ, EKO, DWS, TIPI)

Dependent Variable (DV)	**Predictor**	**β**	**p-value**
WEQ_total	EKO_total	-0.116	**.001**
WEQ_total	DWS_total	0.001	.971
WEQ_total	TIPI_total	0.052	.074
Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.238$	$F = 7.280$	**p < .001**
EKO_total	WEQ_total	-1.231	**.001**
EKO_total	DWS_total	0.025	.736
EKO_total	TIPI_total	-0.158	.093

Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.229$	F = 6.937	**p < .001**
DWS_total	WEQ_total	0.022	.971
DWS_total	EKO_total	0.064	.736
DWS_total	TIPI_total	0.422	**.004**
Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.124$	F = 3.297	**p = .025**

Note. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported. p < .05 indicates statistical significance.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships among WEQ, EKO, DWS, and TIPI, and the results provide important insights into how students' economic conditions, work expectations, perceptions of decent work, and personality traits interact to shape professional development and career identity.

WEQ and EKO: Financial Hardship as a Barrier

The most striking finding was the strong negative association between WEQ and EKO. Students who reported greater financial hardship expressed weaker expectations about their professional future. This aligns with findings from the *Psychology of Working Theory (PWT)*, which emphasizes that economic constraints limit individuals' capacity to pursue meaningful and sustainable work (Duffy et al., 2016). Similarly, Kim et al. (2023) found that financial insecurity restricts young adults' career satisfaction and aspirations.

Evidence from Turkiye strongly supports this pattern. Turk et al. (2018) observed that nursing students from low-income families often selected nursing for job security rather than intrinsic interest, which weakened their long-term professional engagement. Özkan and Uydacı (2020) highlighted that socioeconomic inequality negatively affects both educational participation and career persistence. Furthermore, Sabancıogulları and Dogan (2015) reported that limited financial resources increased students' intention to leave the profession. Together, these findings underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms, including scholarships, stipends, and flexible working opportunities during training, to mitigate the negative impact of financial hardship on WEQ.

WEQ and TIPI: Personality as a Protective Resource

The second major finding was the positive association between WEQ and TIPI. Students with stronger personality traits reported higher work expectations, suggesting that personal attributes play a central role in sustaining professional motivation. This finding is supported by prior studies showing that conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability foster academic resilience, persistence, and professional identity (McLaughlin et al., 2008; Newton et al., 2009; ten Hoeve et al., 2018). Turkish research also emphasizes this relationship. Kantek, Kaya, and Gezer (2017) found that students with higher responsibility and adaptability developed stronger professional values throughout their education. Similarly, Takase (2013) noted that competence development depends not only on training but also on personality-related attributes. These results suggest that TIPI may serve as a protective factor, buffering the negative effects of EKO on WEQ. Therefore, integrating mentorship programs, resilience training, and reflective practices into curricula could strengthen TIPI-related characteristics and reinforce WEQ.

DWS and TIPI: Personality and Perceptions of Work Quality

Another key finding was that DWS was significantly predicted only by TIPI, highlighting the role of personality traits in shaping perceptions of decent work. Students with stronger personality profiles perceived their future professional environments more positively, regardless of economic hardship or current expectations. This result is in line with

the ILO's framework (2019) and with findings from Buyukgoze-Kavas and Autin (2019), who demonstrated that Turkish students' conceptualizations of decent work are strongly influenced by both structural conditions and personal values. International evidence also supports this perspective: Aiken et al., (2014) found that supportive working conditions improved job satisfaction and retention, while Boamah et al., (2017) showed that opportunities for growth reduced burnout and increased commitment. Together, these results indicate that personality traits play a critical role in reinforcing positive perceptions of decent work.

The WEQ–DWS Gap: Expectations vs. Perceptions

Interestingly, this study found no significant relationship between WEQ and DWS. While students expressed expectations regarding fair pay, job security, and work–life balance, these expectations did not necessarily align with broader perceptions of decent work. This finding differs from previous research in Turkiye, where Sabancıogulları and Dogan (2015) highlighted that voluntary career choice and social prestige were positively linked with perceptions of meaningful and decent work. The discrepancy may be explained by the relatively young age of the participants (mean = 20.9 years), who may not yet have fully formed professional identities. Additionally, the current context of economic instability in Turkiye could reduce the alignment between expectations and perceptions.

Integrating Economic, Personal, and Structural Factors

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between economic constraints, personality traits, and structural perceptions of work. Addressing financial hardship through targeted interventions is critical, as prolonged EKO has been linked to burnout and attrition (Rudman & Gustavsson, 2012). At the same time, fostering TIPI-related strengths such as conscientiousness, adaptability, and emotional stability may enhance WEQ and DWS even in the presence of financial difficulties.

International evidence supports these strategies. Wei et al., (2018) found that supportive educational environments improve resilience and satisfaction, while Labrague (2021) reported that resilience training reduces stress and enhances care quality. These findings suggest that combining structural reforms (scholarships, fair wages, safe work environments) with educational interventions (mentorship, reflective practice, resilience programs) may be the most effective approach.

Future Directions

Although this study contributes to understanding the interplay between WEQ, EKO, DWS, and TIPI, further research is needed. Longitudinal studies could assess how these relationships evolve as students transition into the workforce. Multi-institutional and cross-cultural studies could provide insights into contextual differences. Additionally, incorporating qualitative approaches may deepen understanding of how students perceive and internalize decent work and professional identity.

Implications for Nursing Education and Policy

The findings of this study carry several implications for both nursing education and health policy.

First, reducing economic barriers is essential. Expanding scholarships, stipends, and targeted financial support can help ensure that EKO does not undermine students' work expectations or professional identity formation.

Second, integrating resilience-building and personality development into nursing curricula is vital. Mentorship programs, reflective practice, and personality-focused career counseling can strengthen TIPI-related attributes, which were found to be positively associated with both WEQ and DWS.

Third, curricula should explicitly incorporate the principles of decent work, raising awareness about fair wages, safe working conditions, professional growth opportunities, and work–life balance. Such integration may help bridge the gap between students' expectations and their broader perceptions of future work environments.

Finally, a holistic policy approach is needed. By simultaneously addressing structural

conditions (financial support, job security, and fair working environments) and individual factors (personality traits, resilience, and professional identity development), nursing education and policy can foster a workforce that is motivated, resilient, and committed to the profession.

Conclusion: This study demonstrated that WEQ is negatively influenced by EKO, while TIPI positively predicts both WEQ and DWS. No significant relationship was found between WEQ and DWS, reflecting a misalignment between individual expectations and broader perceptions of decent work. These findings underscore the importance of financial support mechanisms, curriculum-based resilience development, and explicit integration of decent work principles into nursing education. By combining structural and individual strategies, education and policy can prepare a workforce that is not only resilient and motivated but also committed to ensuring the sustainability and quality of healthcare systems.

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