

# Can the Public Image of Nursing Be Improved Via the Use of Photographs As a Symbolic Language?

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## ABSTRACT

The society's opinion on the image of nursing is influence on various factors, including choosing the nursing profession and continuation in the profession. This study aimed to examine the effects of using the language of photography to explain the nursing profession as a professional occupation to society. Designed as a non-randomized quasi-experimental (One group pre-test-post-test) study, the research included a sample of 1088 participants who viewed 59 photographs specific to the nursing area. A personal information form and the "Nursing Image Scale" were used as data collection tools. The participants' mean score on the Nursing Image Scale was 65.33 before they attended the photo exhibition and 68.02 after attending it, indicating a statistically significant difference between the pre-test mean score and post-test mean score on the Nursing Image Scale applied to the participants before and after the exhibition ( $p=0.000$ ). From these results, it was concluded that the participants' image of nursing was higher than average, meaning that the photo exhibition improved their image of nursing.

**Keywords:** Nursing image, professional image, language of photography

## Introduction

The nursing profession plays an indispensable role within the healthcare system, helping, in its various capacities, to maintain and protect all areas of individual and public health by taking a holistic approach to providing healthcare (1). Although nursing education falls within the scientific disciplines and requires postgraduate studies, the large amount of research conducted on identifying societal perspectives on the nursing profession has found that the nursing profession has a low social image. The related studies have further shown that society, including doctors, tend to define nurses as "those who fulfill the doctor's demands", "do what the doctor tells them, give injections, measure blood pressure, and check body temperature" (2-8). Although the nursing profession has a long history, its professionalization is significantly affected by the image society has of the profession. The term, image, has been defined as the impression that a

person, a community, or an institution wishes to create or to be created in others about themselves (9,10). The society's opinion on the image of nursing can have major influence on various factors, including interest in pursuing the profession, promotion of the profession, continuation in the profession, and willingness to perform the function of the profession. (2,11) In a report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018, it was stated that there is an insufficient number of nurses and midwives employed globally, and that the need for nurses and midwives will gradually increase. WHO launched the "Nursing Now" campaign in 2018 as a challenge to all countries to address this issue. As part of this campaign, the WHO highlighted the importance of developing the nursing profession, improving its image, and promoting the profession (12,13). The COVID-19 pandemic has generated greater awareness of the need for more nurses, as brought to attention by the WHO

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in 2018, and has demonstrated the importance of the profession (14,15).

The literature states that the low image society has of nursing affects not only the ability to fulfill the need of more nurses in society but also the quality of the communication nurses have with patients and their relatives. It has been reported that particularly in societies with a low image of nursing, patients and their relatives treat nurses unfairly, and in some cases, even resort to violence against them. This relationship between patients and nurses also negatively affects the satisfaction levels of both sides (16,17).

**What is the Language of Photography?:** The use of images as a means to convey meaning dates back to the earliest stages of humankind, as can be seen by the drawings early humans made on the walls of caves. The perception and evaluation of images are directly related to its form. Photographs create a means of contact between a person and the world, fostering a transmission of meaning. The literature on this subject highlight how photographs can be used to control emotional stress, express feelings in creative ways, reflect reality, and transfer information (18). Based on this understanding, the present study was premised on the idea that introducing the nursing profession and the various fields of study of nursing to society using the language of photography could be beneficial in terms of changing the existing misguided attitudes society has of the nursing profession, conveying objective information about the profession, creating interest in choosing the profession, and promoting the profession.

**Purpose of the Study:** This study ultimately aimed to improve society's image of nursing using the language of photography, particularly by showing that nursing is a profession that involves more than simply performing injections, measuring blood pressure, and fulfilling the doctor's orders, and that it qualifies as a professional occupation.

**Study Question:** How did the photo exhibition affect the society's image of nursing?

## Materials and Methods

**Study Design:** A non-randomized quasi-experimental design (One group pretest-posttest) was used in this study. This design examined the effectiveness of the photo exhibition on society's image of nursing. The study was conducted in a

shopping center between September 30 and October 3 of the year 2019.

**The Universe and Sample of the Study:** The study universe included all individuals present at a shopping center during the dates the study was conducted. From this universe, a sample consisting of 1100 individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate was selected using non-probability sampling. Of the 1100 individuals who agreed to participate in the study, 12 (1.1%) were excluded due to failure to fill out the forms completely, leaving 1088 participants who were included in the study.

**Data Collection Tools:** In this study, 59 of the total number of photographs prepared for the study titled "Nursing as a Science and an Art" (project number TSA-2018 6854), which was supported by the Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit of a university in 2018, were used. The study, "Nursing as a Science and an Art", was presented to university staff, students, and their families in 2018 after obtaining necessary permissions from the related institutions, nurses, and patients in the same year. However, this 2018 study was limited to a population whose education level was high and as a result, did not completely achieve its intended purpose. Therefore, it was decided to present the photo exhibition at a place open to the public in order to ensure participation of a broader swathe of the society. A shopping center located in a central area of a province was selected for its convenience of access to the target audience and for having a suitable area to hold the exhibition.

The photographs displayed in the photo exhibition included images of nurses working in different areas of the nursing field, like school health, psychiatry, palliative care, neonatal care, public health, surgical diseases, dialysis, emergency services, intensive care, oncology, and pediatric oncology, and addressing various medical issues, like hemovigilance, informatics, drug addiction, and diabetes. These photographs were taken at the service or institution where real nurses and real patients were present. For data collection, a personal information form developed by the researchers was used to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and their opinions on the photo exhibition, and the Nursing Image Scale (NIS) was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the photo exhibition.

**Personal Information Form:** The personal information form includes questions on the participants' sociodemographic characteristics,

such as age, profession, marital status, and education status, and on their thoughts about the photo exhibition.

**The Nursing Image Scale (NIS):** The NIS was developed in questionnaire form by Özsoy (2000), but its psychometric features were never examined. It was transformed into a scale by Çınar and Demir (2009) by performing the required analyses. The scale consists of 28 items and three sub-dimensions – “General View” (7 items), “Communication” (6 items), and “Vocational and Educational Qualities” (15 items) – that are aimed at determining individuals’ opinions on the nursing profession to assess the public image of nursing. The scale items are measured according to a 3-point Likert-type scale, with response options of “I agree” (3 points), “I partially agree” (2 point), and “I do not agree” (1 point). Some of the items are reverse scored, with “I agree” (1 point), “I partially agree” (2 points), and “I do not agree” (3 points). The minimum possible score on the scale is 28, while the maximum possible score is 84. Higher scores indicate a positive nursing image (11,19).

In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficient of the NIS was determined to be 0.855 before the photo exhibition and 0.899 after the exhibition.

**Data Collection Process:** After receiving permissions from the authorized institutions, the study data were collected at the shopping center hosting the photo exhibition over the course of four days, from September 30 to October, 3 2019, between the hours of 10.00 and 19.00. The participants were informed about the study prior to observing the exhibition, and verbal and written consents were received from those who agreed to participate. Before the participants attended the photo exhibition, the NIS was administered to them. Next, the researchers introduced the 59 nursing-related photographs to the participants and personally answered and discussed any questions they had. After the photo exhibition, the participants filled out the personal information form and were re-administered the NIS.

**Statistical Analysis:** To analyze the study data, descriptive statistics, i.e., frequency, percentage, and mean, were calculated, and paired sample t-test and multiple correspondence analysis were conducted to identify inter-group differences. In addition, Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was used to the NIS Pre-Test – Post-Test scores of the participants and because the score values showed normal distribution, paired sample t-test

was applied. All analyses were performed with the SPSS 13.0 statistical package program.

**Ethical Considerations:** Prior to collecting the data, written permission to perform the study was obtained from Van Yüzüncü Yil University (decision number: 85157263-604.01.02-E.37707; date: 15.05.2019). Verbal and written consents were received from the participants who agreed to participate in the study. Informed written consents were also obtained from all nurses, patients, and families of the patient to use their images in the photo exhibition.

## Results

The data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants showed that 571 (52.5%) were male, their mean age was  $26 \pm 0.279$  years, and 274 (25.2%) were secondary or high school graduates (Table 1).

Regarding the opinions of the participants on the nursing profession, 23.3% stated that they learned from the exhibition that nursing education lasts four years, 13.1% learned that there are male nurses in the nursing profession, 42.8% learned that nurses can also have the title of professor/associate professor, and 84.7% learned about the World Health Organization’s campaign, "Nursing Now". From the results of the NIS, it was further found that the participants viewed the most credible and respected professional groups to be doctors, lawyers, and engineers-architects, in respective order. When asked what should be done to make the nursing profession a more credible and respected profession, 63.9% of the participants recommended introducing the nursing profession to society in a much more effective way, 25.3% recommended paying them higher salaries, and 10.8% recommended to increase the number of nurse appointments (Table 2).

Regarding the participants’ opinions on the content and execution of the exhibition, it was found that the exhibition helped the participants learn about nursing informatics, hemovigilance nursing, school health nursing, palliative care nursing, and psychiatric nursing. Furthermore, 981 (90.2%) of the participants stated that the photographs presented in the exhibition were either suitable or very suitable for bringing understanding to the subject (Table 3).

The NIS was applied to the participants before and after the exhibition to determine the exhibition’s effectiveness. Results from the analysis of the participants’ responses on the scale

**Table 1.** Distribution of participants by socio-demographic characteristics (N:1088)

Demographic Variables	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	517	47.5
Male	571	52.5
Age interval		
18 – 25	685	63.0
26 – 33	224	20.6
34 - 41	101	9.3
Older than or equal to 42 years of age	78	7.2
Education status		
Not literate	14	1.3
Literate	26	2.4
Primary school	25	2.3
Secondary school-high school	274	25.2
University	666	61.2
Master's Degree/Doctorate	83	7.6

showed that the score interval was between 34 and 84 points, with the mean score being  $65.33 \pm 8.93$  points before the exhibition and  $68.02 \pm 9.67$  points after the exhibition. Considering that the maximum possible score on the NIS is 84, it can be stated that the participants had a higher-than-average image of nursing. According to the results of the t-test, conducted to determine whether there were any differences between the pre-test mean score and post-test mean score on the NIS applied to the participants before and after the exhibition, there was a statistically significant difference between the NIS pre-test and post-test mean scores ( $p=0.000$ ). (Table 4).

Multiple correspondence analysis was conducted with the variables of age, gender, education status, opinions and recommendations of the participants regarding the exhibition, and whether the exhibition changed the perspective on the nursing profession. The summary findings of the multiple correspondence analysis, which are presented in Figure 1, show that 32.5% of the total variance was explained with the 1st dimension and 29.5% of the total variance was explained with the 2nd dimension. Together, these two dimensions explained 62% of the total variance. In examining the multiple correspondence analysis configuration of these variables, it was seen that the participants who were between 34 and 41 years of age, or at least 42 years old, who were not literate, literate or had primary school status, and who answered "Very good" to the question, "How well did the exhibition change your perspective on

the nursing profession?" expressed that "Nursing should receive more respect within the society" in the "Your views and suggestions" section. This analysis also showed that the female participants who were between 18 and 25 years of age, had secondary-high-school education status, and answered "Not good" or "Good" to the question of "How well did the exhibition change your perspective on the nursing profession?" indicated that "The working conditions (salary, job burden, etc.) of nurses should be improved" in the "Your views and suggestions" section (Figure 1).

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effects of the language of photography on explaining the nursing profession as a professional occupation to society.

In recent years, society's image of nursing has been a frequently discussed topic on account of the rise in the number of nurses leaving the professions and the consequent problems experienced by the insufficiency of nurses (20-23). The Nursing Law introduced in Turkey in 2011 secured the professional status of nurses and specifically defined their areas of specialty, yet despite this, their professional roles have failed to be recognized by society at large (8). This failure of society to recognize the professional status of nursing plays a negative role in terms of individuals choosing to pursue a nursing career

**Table 2.** The distribution of participants' Opinions Regarding the Nursing Profession

Opinions Regarding the Nursing Profession		n(%)	Total N
Did you know that nursing education lasts four years?	I learned it from the exhibition	253(23.3)	1088
	I knew it before	835(76.7)	
Did you know that there are also male nurses in the nursing profession?	I learned it from the exhibition	142(13.1)	1088
	I knew it before	946(86.9)	
Did you know that the nursing profession can involve graduate education, and that there are also nurses who have the title of doctor, associate professor, and professor?	I learned it from the exhibition	466(42.8)	1088
	I knew it before	622(57.2)	
What do you think should be done to make the nursing profession more credible and better known?	Nursing profession can be introduced to the society in a much more effective way.	367(63.9)	574
	The salaries of nurses can be increased.	145(25.3)	
	The number of nurse appointments can be increased.	62(10.8)	
What do you think is the most reputable profession in our country?	Medical doctors	388(57.5)	675
	Lawyers	104(15.4)	
	Engineers-Architects	62(9.2)	
	Other professions	121(17.9)	
What do you think is the most respected profession in our country?	Medical doctors	366(52.4)	699
	Lawyers	120(17.2)	
	Engineers-Architects	86 (12.3)	
	Other professions	127(18.2)	
What do you think as the most difficult profession in our country?	Medical doctors	221 (37.2)	594
	Lawyers	145(24.4)	
	Engineers-Architects	101(17.0)	
	Other professions	127(21.4)	
Do you think nursing is a profession that has developed?	Yes	785(72.2)	1088
	No	303(27.8)	
Do you think the nursing profession is a scientific profession?	Yes	980(90.1)	1088
	No	108(9.9)	
Are you aware of the World Health Organization's campaign, 'Nursing Now'?	Yes	167(15.3)	1088
	No	921(84.7)	
Should nurses have a greater role in health-related decisions?	Yes	885(81.3)	1088
	No	203(18.7)	
Would you recommend pursuing the nursing profession to your immediate families?	Yes	885(81.3)	1088
	No	203(18.7)	
Do you find the nursing profession credible?	Yes	720(66.2)	1088
	No	145(13.3)	
Do you find nurses to be effective in preventive health services?	Partially	223(20.5)	1088
	Yes	700(64.3)	
	No	108(9.9)	
	Partially	280(25.7)	

Do you find nurses to be effective in therapeutic healthcare services?	Yes	764(70.2)	1088
	No	93(8.5)	
	Partially	231(21.2)	
Do you have any nurses or midwives in your family?	Yes	715(65.7)	1088
	No	373(34.3)	

**Table 3.** The distribution of Participants’ Opinions on The Content and Execution of The Exhibition

Opinions on the Content, Planning and execution of the Exhibition	Not Good at All n(%)	Not Good n(%)	Moderately Good n(%)	Good n(%)	Very Good n(%)	Total N
How well-suited was the theme of the exhibition to the nursing profession?	21(1.9)	12(1.1)	76(7.0)	245(22.5)	734(67.5)	1088
How well did the photographs exhibited help you to properly understand the subject?	14(1.3)	16(1.5)	77(7.1)	268(24.6)	713(65.5)	1088
How well did the photographs exhibited in the exhibition create greater cognitive awareness of the subject and emotionally connect you with it?	34(3.1)	42(3.9)	145(13.3)	281(25.8)	586(53.9)	1088
To what degree was the exhibition meaningful and important in terms of improving the image of nursing?	17(1.6)	29(2.7)	122(11.2)	256(23.5)	664(61.0)	1088
How well did the exhibition change your perspective on the nursing profession?	95(8.7)	68(6.3)	204(18.8)	265(24.4)	456(41.9)	1088
How well did the exhibition succeed in introducing you to new information and experience that you can share with your friends?	57(5.2)	57(5.2)	202(18.6)	244(22.4)	528(48.5)	1088
What is your evaluation of the exhibition in general?	15(1.4)	32(2.9)	142(13.1)	296(27.2)	603(55.4)	1088
What is your evaluation of the exhibition in terms of it being a social activity?	27(2.5)	40(3.7)	170(15.6)	287(26.4)	564(51.8)	1088
Did the exhibition introduce you to new areas of the nursing profession?			Yes		629(57.8)	1088
			I had information before		459(42.2)	
What new nursing areas did you learn about through the exhibition?			Nursing Informatics		34(8.3)	408
			Hemovigilance Nursing		33(8.1)	
			School Health Nursing		24(5.9)	
			Palliative Care Nursing		44(10.8)	
			Psychiatric Nursing		20(4.9)	
			Other nursing areas		253(62.0)	
Which photograph did you find to be most effective?			Nursing Informatics		93(12.3)	758
			Hemovigilance Nursing		74(9.8)	
			School Health Nursing		75(9.9)	
			Palliative Care Nursing		62(8.2)	
			Psychiatric Nursing		49(6.5)	
			Other nursing areas		405(53.4)	
Which nursing area affected you the most?			Pediatric Oncology Nursing		60(7.5)	802
			Palliative Care Nursing		60(7.5)	

	Psychiatric Nursing	72(9.0)	
	Neonatal Nursing	61(7.6)	
	Surgical Nursing	69(8.6)	
	Other nursing areas	480(59.9)	
Did the exhibition have a positive effect in terms of promoting the nursing profession?	Yes	906(83.3)	1088
	No	182(16.7)	
What are your views on and suggestions for the exhibition?	It was a beautiful and informative exhibition.	119(59.5)	
	Nursing should receive more respect within the society.	59(29.5)	200
	The improvement of nurses' working conditions (salary, job burden etc.).	22(11.0)	

**Table 4.** Participants' NIS Pre-Test–Post-Test Mean Scores and the t-Test Results

Score	Tests	n	$\bar{x}$	Standard deviation	Standard error	t	P
Mean Score on the NIS	Pre-test	1088	65.3346	8.93	0.27	-6.795	0.000
	Post-test	1088	68.0165	9.67	0.29		

\*p<0.05

and of society conferring the deserved value on the profession (24).

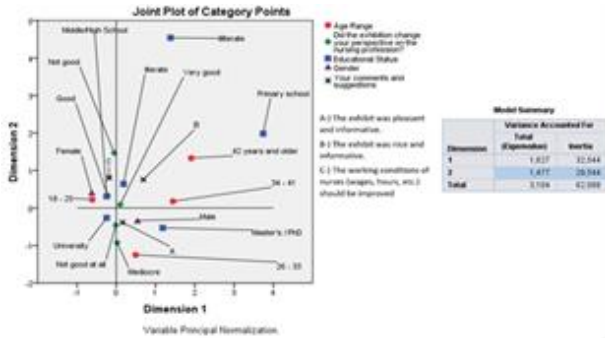
In the literature review conducted for this study, it was observed that most of the studies related to the image of nursing were carried out with nurses or nursing students, with only a very limited number conducted with other groups (10, 24-28). To fill this gap in the research on the image of nursing, the present study drew a sample from a broad population by selecting participants attending a photo exhibition open to the public.

Studies conducted with nursing students have shown that the image of nursing is directly influenced by a society's perception of it (4,22,29-31). For example, the study by Kızılcık Özkan et al. reported that 35% of nursing students definitely agreed with the statement, "Nursing is a respected profession in society"; while in another study conducted with nursing students, it was found that 59.2% of the students agreed with the statement, "Nursing is a profession respected in society", and that 58.2% of them agreed with the statement, "The nursing profession has prominent status in society" (31,32).

The literature on this subject includes studies showing the public image of nursing to be low (4,9,19,24,29,31,33,34). The findings obtained in the present study support this idea, insofar as it found that the participants, despite the above-average perception they had of the nursing profession, placed the nursing profession in the

lower ranks of professional groups they considered to be the most credible and respected professional groups. However, in contrast to these findings, there are other studies that have reported society's image of nursing to be positive (2,7,32,35-37). This conflicting positive image could be attributed to the region where the studies were conducted or to the study samples.

In some studies, a large part of society was shown to have an overall lack of awareness about certain areas of nursing, including their tasks and responsibilities and the fact that they receive undergraduate and post-graduate education and can have the titles of associate professor and professor (6,33). Similar findings were obtained in the present study, with 23.3% of the participants stating that they learned from the exhibition that nursing education lasts four years, 13.1% stating they learned that male nurses are involved in the nursing profession, and 42.8% stating they learned that nurses can also have the title of professor/associate professor. Moreover, the participants reported that they learned about nursing informatics, hemovigilance nursing, school health nursing, palliative care nursing, and psychiatric nursing from the exhibition. When asked what should be done to make the nursing profession more credible and bring greater awareness to the profession, 63.9% of the participants in this study suggested that the nursing profession should be introduced to society



**Fig. 1.** The Configuration of The Multiple Fit Analysis in a much more effective way. It is discouraging that the tasks and responsibilities of nurses, who play such a major role in healthcare, have not been completely understood by society, and that the profession is still perceived as merely a profession supplementary to that of doctors (28). Overall, the data show that there is a considerable lack of knowledge in society about the nursing profession and that the low image society has of nursing may be responsible for this.

In the analyses conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the photo exhibition, it was found that 90.2% of the participants believed the photographs presented in the exhibition to be suitable or very suitable for facilitating a better understanding of the subject, 84.6% found the exhibition to be meaningful and an effective way to improve the image of nursing, 66.3% believed the exhibition served to positively change their perspectives on the nursing profession, 57.8% felt they learned new areas of the nursing professions through the exhibition, and 83.3% thought the exhibition had a positive effect on promoting the nursing profession. According to the t-test analysis, it can be stated that the exhibition had an overall positive effect on the image of nursing.

**The Limitations of the Study:** There are two important limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted in only one province, and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the wider population. Second, the pre-test and post-test were conducted with only one group.

It can be argued from the results of the study that the photo exhibition held within the scope of the research created greater awareness about the nursing profession and introduced individuals to new areas of nursing, resulting in a positive change to the participants' image of nursing.

We recommend that more studies be conducted on this subject to reach more people in society and thereby gain a broader understanding of it.

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