

## Determination of Professional Image Perceptions of Nursing Students

### Abstract

**Background:** The image of nursing can determine the limits of the profession and reflect the value of a professional nurse. It is essential to determine the professional image perceptions of nursing students in order to reveal their professional profile.

**Aim:** This study was conducted to determine the professional image perceptions of nursing students.

**Methods:** This research is a descriptive study carried out with 538 students studying at the nursing department of a foundation university and volunteering to participate in the study. The research data were collected using the "Personal Information Form" and "Image Scale for the Nursing Profession." The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance, *t*-test, and Scheffe's test as post hoc analysis.

**Results:** It was determined that the students scored  $159.04 \pm 17.61$  points on the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession, and the subscale of professional qualifications had the highest mean score ( $48.51 \pm 5.39$ ), while the subscale of professional status had the lowest mean score ( $11.08 \pm 2.87$ ). Significant differences were found in the "Professional Qualifications" subscale according to the students' gender variable, in the "Image Scale for the Nursing Profession and its subscales" according to the grade variable, in the "Education" subscale according to the variable of selecting the department willingly, in the "Professional Status" subscale according to the reason for choosing the department, and the "Education," "Professional Status," and "Appearance" subscales according to the status of changing the department ( $P < .05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The students' nursing image score averages were at a good level. The image perception of first-year nursing students was low, and role modeling in theoretical and clinical training should be provided by orientation programs, and for new students, adaptation training should be provided.

**Keywords:** Nursing students, professional image, professionalism

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### Introduction

From the past to the present, nurses have been the backbone of the health sector and formed the basis for providing quality care to all citizens of a country. Nowadays, with preventive services coming to the forefront instead of treatment-oriented health services, the educational, administrative, decision-making, coordinator, and counselor roles of nurses have come to the fore, and development from the traditional model to professionalism has been experienced.<sup>1,2</sup> Nurses, one of the most generalized professions, were regarded as angels of mercy, spouses and mothers, and doctors' assistants in the past.<sup>3-7</sup>

The image of nursing is affected by many factors, such as the history of nursing, social image, social norms, media, having a family member who is a nurse, doctor-nurse interaction, heavy working conditions, the risk of violence, exposure to occupational health hazards, insufficient wages, inadequate employment, and inadequate clinical branching.<sup>5,8-19</sup>

The professional identities of nurses constitute the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of nurses and the thoughts and beliefs of society about nurses.<sup>2</sup> Nurses who provide services by promising the future to society, which is interested in what the profession is, can change the society's negative perceptions of the profession more effectively. Nurses' perceptions of their career affect their thoughts and actions in professional relationships. Therefore, nurses with positive professional images will be stronger and be able to establish healing relationships with their patients. Thus, nurses need to recognize changes in perception concerning the future of nursing roles.<sup>2,17</sup>

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Furthermore, to develop the nursing profession, there is a need for qualified and responsible members who love practicing nursing care and have command of the profession. The education level of a nurse is also important for the public image because a country's valuing of education can be associated with how the public perceives a health-care professional.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, this need should be met by university students who are trained to become nurses in the future.<sup>20,21</sup>

Nursing students enter nursing education with their beliefs about nursing, which have developed over the years.<sup>22</sup> Nursing students' perceptions of nursing influence self-concept, self-esteem, loving the profession, and professional performance.<sup>7,23</sup> The image perception of students can help academicians to evaluate the strong and weak aspects of nursing education programs and support the development of the curriculum toward a holistic nursing paradigm.<sup>23</sup> In light of this information, the present study was conducted to determine the professional image perceptions of nursing students.

### Research Questions

- What is the level of the professional image perceptions of nursing students?
- Is there a significant difference between the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students and the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession (ISNP) total score and subscales' mean scores?

## Methods

### Research Design

This research is a descriptive study.

### Study Participants

The study population consisted of 842 students enrolled in the formal education program at the nursing department of a Foundation University in the 2017-2018 academic year. It was planned to include all nursing students in the study population, and the sample group consisted of 538 nursing students who met the following criteria. The sample size was determined as 264 nursing students, taking into account the sample size table with 95% reliability and  $\pm 0.05$  margin of error.

The inclusion criteria were determined as follows:

- being at school on the research dates, and
- volunteering to participate in the research.

### Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool consists of 2 sections: the "Socio-demographic Characteristics Form" and the "Image Scale for the Nursing Profession."

#### Socio-demographic Characteristics Form

It was developed based on the literature and consists of 6 questions about students' age, gender, grade, the status of selecting the department willingly, the reason for choosing the department, and the status of changing the department.

#### Image Scale for the Nursing Profession

The 5-point Likert scale developed by Dost and Bahçecik to determine the professional image perceptions of nurses consists of 6 subscales (professional qualifications, working conditions, gender, education, appearance, and professional status) and 42 items. Items 8, 14, 15, 17,

18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, and 31 should be coded reversely. The score that can be obtained from the scale varies between 42 and 210 points, and as the total score of the scale increases, the image perception also increases positively. The total score of 42-75 is very poor, the score of 76-109 is weak, the score of 110-143 is medium, the score of 144-177 is good, and the score of 178-210 is very good, and it expresses that there is an image perception. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated in the following way:  $\alpha=0.963$  for the professional qualifications subscale;  $\alpha=0.827$  for the working conditions subscale;  $\alpha=0.844$  for the gender subscale;  $\alpha=0.870$  for the education subscale size;  $\alpha=0.928$  for the appearance subscale;  $\alpha=0.861$  for the professional status subscale, and  $\alpha=0.885$  for the overall scale.<sup>2</sup> In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was  $\alpha=0.823$  for the professional qualifications subscale;  $\alpha=0.715$  for the working conditions subscale;  $\alpha=0.920$  for the gender subscale;  $\alpha=0.894$  for the education subscale size;  $\alpha=0.887$  for the appearance subscale;  $\alpha=0.814$  for the professional status subscale, and  $\alpha=0.872$  for the overall scale. Accordingly, the measurement results were highly reliable.<sup>24</sup>

### Data Collection

One of the researchers distributed the data collection forms, and the students who accepted to participate in the study were informed how to fill them out. The research data were collected between January and February 2018. It took approximately 25-30 minutes for each class to fill out the data collection forms.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained (approval number: 10840 098-604.01.01-E.7681) from the Ethics Committee of İstanbul Medipol University, and written permission was received from the institution. Furthermore, the written informed consent of the students participating in the study was obtained.

### Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows 22.0 program (IBM SPSS Corp.; Armonk, NY, USA). Number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistical methods to evaluate the data. Parametric tests were used because the result of the Shapiro-Wilk test was  $P > .05$ . When comparing the scale and subscale scores according to socio-demographic variables, the *t*-test was used to compare the quantitative continuous data between 2 independent groups, and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare the quantitative continuous data between more than 2 independent groups. After the ANOVA test, Scheffe's test was used as a complementary post hoc analysis to determine the differences.

## Results

Of the students participating in the study, 88.3% were female, and their mean age was  $19.89 \pm 1.47$  (18-28) years. It was determined that 44.2% of the students were second-grade students, 60.2% selected the nursing department willingly, 48.7% selected nursing due to the "ease of finding a job," 21.9% selected nursing at the request of the family and environment, and 40.5% did not want to change the nursing department.

The ISNP mean score of nursing students was  $159.04 \pm 17.61$  (101.00-199.00). It was revealed that the students obtained the following scores

from the subscales:  $48.51 \pm 5.39$  (23.00-55.00) from "professional qualifications,"  $32.39 \pm 6.67$  (10.00-50.00) from "working conditions,"  $32.76 \pm 6.04$  from "gender,"  $21.80 \pm 4.42$  (8.00-40.00) from "education,"  $12.51 \pm 4.74$  from "appearance" (3.00-15.00), and  $11.08 \pm 2.87$  points from the "professional status" (5.00-25.00) subscale. The professional qualifications subscale had the highest mean score ( $48.51 \pm 5.39$ ), while the professional status subscale had the lowest mean score ( $11.08 \pm 2.87$ ) (Table 1). The professional qualifications subscale scores ( $x=48.712$ ) of the women participating in the study were higher than the professional qualifications scores ( $x=46.952$ ) of the men ( $t=2.444$ ;  $P=.036 < .05$ ). Students' working conditions, gender, education, appearance, professional status subscales, and total scale scores did not differ significantly according to the gender variable ( $P > .05$ ) (Table 2).

The scores of the professional qualifications' subscale differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=71.458$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the professional qualifications scores of the second-grade students were higher than the professional qualifications scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ), and the professional qualifications scores of the third and fourth-grade students were higher than the professional qualifications scores of the first and the second-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). According to the class variable, the scores of the working conditions subscale differed significantly ( $F=48.492$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the scores of the working conditions subscale of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). Students' gender subscale scores differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=124.389$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the scores of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). The education subscale scores differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=98.742$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the scores of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). The appearance subscale scores of the students differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=18.698$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the appearance scores of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). The scores of the professional status subscale differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=23.644$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the scores of

the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the professional status scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ). The scale total scores of the students differed significantly according to the class variable ( $F=298.711$ ;  $P=0 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the scale total scores of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students ( $P < .05$ ), and the scores of the third- and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the second-grade students ( $P < .05$ ) (Table 2).

The education scores of the students who voluntarily chose the nursing department ( $x=22.167$ ) were higher than the education scores ( $x=21.238$ ) of the students who chose the department unwillingly ( $t=2.394$ ;  $P=.024 < .05$ ). The students' professional qualifications, working conditions, gender, appearance, professional status subscales, and total scale scores did not differ significantly according to the variable of preferring the department willingly ( $P > .05$ ) (Table 2).

According to the variable of the reason for choosing the department, the scores of the professional status subscale differed significantly ( $F=3.424$ ;  $P=.005 < .05$ ). In the further analysis, the professional status subscale scores of the students who chose nursing for "acquiring a profession," "helping people," and "family/environment's request" were higher compared to the students who chose nursing because of "preference error" ( $P < .05$ ). The professional status subscale scores of the students who chose nursing for "acquiring a profession," "helping people," and "family/environment's request" were higher compared to the students who chose nursing for "other" reasons ( $P < .05$ ). The students' professional qualifications, working conditions, gender, education, appearance subscales, and total scale scores did not differ significantly according to the variable of the reason for choosing the department ( $P > .05$ ) (Table 2).

## Discussion

The image of nursing can determine the limits of the profession and reflect the value of a professional nurse. It is essential to determine the professional image perceptions of nursing students to reveal their professional profile. In this study, which examined the professional image perceptions of nursing students, the students' professional image scale score was 159, and it was determined that the nursing students' professional image perceptions were at a good level. Similar to the research findings, a study conducted in Zambia in 2017 found that 70% of nursing students had a good professional image perception.<sup>22</sup> A study involving 3000 university students in California determined that students perceived the nursing image positively due to finding a job easily and a good income.<sup>8</sup> A study conducted in Belgium stated that the majority of students perceived their images well and were proud to choose their profession.<sup>25</sup> A study carried out with nursing students in Egypt showed that nursing students chose the profession of their own will and were even proud of their choice. This can be explained by high self-image perception, which they can consider more important than public image. Therefore, the choice of nursing as a career depends not only on the public image, social prestige, the media, role models, nursing educators, nursing pioneers, and nursing education programs, as is reported, but also on the self-perception of the image.<sup>26</sup> A study conducted by Yilmaz<sup>27</sup> in 2019 found that nursing students had good professional image perceptions. A study carried out by Kızılıcak Özkan et al<sup>21</sup> (2017) determined that students had a medium level of professional image perceptions. Another study conducted with university students studying

**Table 1. Mean Scores of the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession and Its Subscales (n=538)**

Subscales	Min-Max	Mean $\pm$ SD
Professional qualifications	23.00-55.00	$48.51 \pm 5.39$
Working conditions	10.00-50.00	$32.39 \pm 6.67$
Gender	8.00-40.00	$32.76 \pm 6.04$
Education	5.00-25.00	$21.80 \pm 4.42$
Appearance	3.00-15.00	$12.51 \pm 4.74$
Professional status	5.00-25.00	$11.08 \pm 2.87$
<b>Total</b>	101.00-199.00	$159.04 \pm 17.61$

SD, standard deviation.

Table 2. Comparison of the Image Scale for the Nursing Profession and Subscales' Scores and Descriptive Characteristics

Characteristics	n	Professional Qualifications	Working Conditions	Gender	Education	Appearance	Professional Status	Image Total
		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
<b>Gender</b>								
Female	475	48.71 ± 5.24	32.41 ± 6.55	32.68 ± 6.02	21.87 ± 4.42	12.44 ± 4.63	11.09 ± 2.87	159.19 ± 17.41
Male	63	46.95 ± 6.25	32.24 ± 7.57	33.35 ± 6.25	21.25 ± 4.44	13.08 ± 5.45	11.00 ± 2.88	157.87 ± 19.19
<b>t</b>		2.444	0.188	-0.823	1.038	-1.010	0.224	0.559
<b>P</b>		.036*	.851	.411	.300	.313	.822	.576
<b>Grade</b>								
1	166	44.90 ± 5.99	28.53 ± 6.19	27.69 ± 7.25	18.38 ± 6.01	10.52 ± 4.21	9.98 ± 2.98	140.00 ± 15.82
2	238	49.61 ± 4.55	33.74 ± 6.36	34.77 ± 3.80	23.13 ± 2.41	13.61 ± 4.99	11.53 ± 2.69	166.39 ± 11.33
3-4	134	51.01 ± 3.36	34.77 ± 5.69	35.47 ± 3.12	23.67 ± 1.57	13.03 ± 4.11	11.62 ± 2.66	169.57 ± 7.25
<b>F</b>		71.458	48.492	124.389	98.742	23.644	18.698	298.711
<b>P</b>		.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*
Post hoc		2 > 1, 3 > 1, 3 > 2 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1 (P < .05)	2 > 1, 3 > 1, 3 > 2 (P < .05)
<b>Status of selecting the department willingly</b>								
Yes	324	48.52 ± 5.46	32.19 ± 6.20	33.09 ± 5.50	22.17 ± 3.86	12.80 ± 4.89	11.24 ± 2.81	160.01 ± 15.90
No	214	48.49 ± 5.31	32.68 ± 7.32	32.26 ± 6.76	21.24 ± 5.11	12.08 ± 4.48	10.82 ± 2.94	157.57 ± 19.88
<b>t</b>		0.052	-0.836	1.572	2.394	1.729	1.672	1.574
<b>P</b>		.958	.404	.132	.024*	.084	.095	.133
<b>Reason for selecting nursing</b>								
Ease of finding a job	262	47.81 ± 5.78	32.18 ± 6.50	32.82 ± 6.32	21.55 ± 4.54	12.27 ± 4.82	11.22 ± 2.85	157.85 ± 18.38
Helping people	69	49.13 ± 3.83	31.33 ± 6.64	32.75 ± 5.58	22.32 ± 4.09	12.94 ± 5.10	11.38 ± 2.77	159.86 ± 14.87
Preference error	33	49.30 ± 5.40	33.06 ± 6.90	32.64 ± 5.87	21.24 ± 4.64	11.97 ± 4.51	9.64 ± 3.62	157.85 ± 18.50
Request of the family/ environment	118	49.01 ± 5.45	32.71 ± 7.20	32.43 ± 6.04	22.13 ± 4.35	12.82 ± 4.61	11.32 ± 2.49	160.42 ± 17.46
Providing professional development	33	48.88 ± 5.00	33.39 ± 5.07	34.12 ± 4.55	22.64 ± 2.84	14.09 ± 3.56	10.91 ± 2.64	164.03 ± 11.53
Other	23	50.30 ± 4.22	33.78 ± 7.52	32.04 ± 6.54	21.00 ± 5.70	10.87 ± 4.69	9.61 ± 3.43	157.61 ± 22.32
<b>F</b>		1.970	0.868	0.474	0.984	1.731	3.424	1.006
<b>P</b>		.081	.502	.795	.427	.126	.005*	.413
Post hoc							1 > 3, 2 > 3, 4 > 3, 1 > 6, 2 > 6, 4 > 6 (P < .05)	

\*P < .05.  
t, independent t-test; F, one-way ANOVA; SD, standard deviation.

in different departments stated that the nursing image was at a good level.<sup>28</sup> In a qualitative study carried out by Özmen and Çetinkaya<sup>29</sup> (2016) with fourth-grade nursing students, students included positive statements about the nursing image. These findings are in line with our study results.

This study determined that nursing students received the highest mean score (48.51 ± 5.39) from the “professional qualifications” subscale and the lowest mean score (12.51 ± 4.74) from the “professional status” subscale. Similar to the research findings, in a study carried out by Yılmaz<sup>27</sup> with first-grade nursing students, the highest mean

score was obtained from the professional qualifications subscale. A study conducted by Kızılıçık Özkan et al<sup>21</sup> stated the professional qualifications score of nursing students as high. Upon evaluating professional qualifications, it is observed that nurses are healthcare professionals who spend most of their time with healthy/sick individuals, and nurses must be patient and self-sacrificing, creative, guiding/counselor, and aware of their social responsibilities.<sup>2,30,31</sup> Similar to our study results, the studies by Kızılıçık Özkan et al<sup>21</sup> and Çelik et al<sup>32</sup> found that nursing students obtained low scores from the “Professional status” subscale and agreed with the statement “It is a profession appreciated by the society” at a quite low level. The study results reveal that nursing students are adversely affected by the society’s perception of nursing. Although nurses are accepted as indispensable members of the medical team, most studies conducted to date in Turkey have stated nursing as a profession with a low status, and nurses have not been regarded more than physician assistants.<sup>6</sup> To improve the status of the nursing profession in society, organizing nursing career days, covering secondary and high school students, families, and teachers, and introducing the profession by nursing academicians play a key role in correcting the misinformation obtained by the public about the nursing profession from the media. To increase the visibility of the nursing profession and share information about the profession, nurses should be more active in the media and use social media actively.<sup>33</sup> The higher participation of nurses in decision-making processes positively affects the professional status perceived by nurses, their self-esteem, and job satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

Upon comparing socio-demographic characteristics and the mean scores of the professional image scale, it was found that female nursing students’ “professional qualifications” subscale mean score was higher than that of men. Likewise, the studies by Tarım,<sup>34</sup> Kaya and İşler Dalgıç,<sup>35</sup> and Taşkıran et al<sup>36</sup> found that the professional qualification scores of female students were higher than those of men. Considering the difference between the genders, from society’s point of view, nursing is a profession suited to the female gender, and women fulfill the caregiver role more, reflecting this social image. Although the title of “male nurse” has recently been brought into society, the professional qualification scores of women are higher than those of men.

In the study, the ISNP total and subscale scores of the second-, third-, and fourth-grade students were higher than the scores of the first-grade students. Similar to the present research results, Taşkıran et al<sup>36</sup> (2020) found that the perception of the professional image increased as the class level increased. It can be explained by the higher average of the professional image of students studying at higher grades than students who have just started their undergraduate education, their higher motivation in nursing due to their higher theoretical knowledge, and their awareness of its importance. Nursing interventions are performed as a result of clinical practice and vocational lessons. Parallel to the increased education level, the value attributed to the chosen profession becomes different. The higher perception of professional image with an increase in the class level can be explained by the fact that students know the profession and gain spiritual satisfaction due to the increased knowledge and practices of the nursing profession.

The “education subscale” mean scores of the students who chose the nursing department voluntarily were higher compared to the students

who did not choose the department at their own will. Likewise, Mollaoğlu et al<sup>37</sup>(2010) determined that those who chose nursing willingly understood theoretical information better and viewed the profession more positively. A study conducted with nursing students in Egypt found that students who chose the profession voluntarily had higher levels of professional image perception, and the findings supported the research results.<sup>26</sup> Choosing the profession in line with their own preferences increases the motivation of individuals, enables them to be happy, and has a direct impact on their professionalism and, therefore, on the development of the profession.

In this study, the “professional status” subscale scores of the students who chose nursing for acquiring a profession, helping people, and family/environment’s request were higher than those who chose nursing because of preference error and other reasons. Similar to the current research results, a study conducted with nursing students revealed that the professional status scores of the students who chose the profession willingly were higher than the students who chose the profession compulsively.<sup>38</sup> It is thought that the high professional status scores of those who choose the profession voluntarily are the ease of identification with the profession and employment after graduation.

#### Limitations of the study

This research was conducted at a foundation university in Istanbul as it is performed on students studying in the nursing department. Therefore, it cannot be generalised to the wider nursing students population in Turkey.

#### Conclusion

The study conducted to determine the professional image perceptions of nursing students found that the nursing image mean scores of students were at a good level. However, it was revealed that the occupational status subscale scores of nursing students were low, and the image scores of the first-year students were the lowest. Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

- For nursing students to achieve a good level of perceptions about the nursing profession status, it is important that nurses are more involved in health-related programs in the media and that nurses’ scientific resources are used by society.
- Every new student who enters the nursing department should be included in orientation programs as soon as possible, and adaptation training and role models for students should be provided. Academic nurses should collaborate with nursing students to support their professional image.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was received for this study from İstanbul Medipol University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee (2016, Number: 10840098-604.01.01-E.7681).

**Informed Consent:** The written informed consent of the students participating in the study was obtained.

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