

Manager Nurses' Views on Male Nurses: A Study of Phenomenology

Abstract

Background: For hundreds of years, nursing has been perceived as an occupation primarily for women. However, although the number of male nurses is increasing, it has not yet reached a desirable level. It is important for both men and women to be included in the profession to help eliminate gender stereotypes in nursing.



Aim: This study was conducted to determine how nurse managers perceive the presence of male nurses, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of working with male nurses and their contributions to the profession.

Methods: The qualitative study was conducted using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Data were collected from 22 nurse managers who agreed to participate in the study. The study involved administering 10 open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interview questions between May and December 2018. The interviews were analyzed through content analysis.

Results: All of the nurse managers were female, with the majority being married (77.27%) and holding a bachelor's degree (59.09%). The study findings categorized nurse managers' perceptions of male nurses into five themes (perception, advantage, disadvantage, professional contribution, and future roles) and fifteen sub-themes.

Conclusion: The study found that nurse managers recognized that male nurses provided advantages in the workplace, citing fewer responsibilities in their personal lives due to not being female and greater physical strength. Additionally, male nurses contributed to enhancing the professional image by reducing conflicts and violence in the workplace. It is important to support the presence of male nurses in the profession and, as in any other field, to eliminate gender discrimination in nursing by addressing social prejudices.

Keywords: Discrimination, gender, male nurses, nurse manager, qualitative study

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Introduction

Social perceptions have historically associated certain professions with gender stereotypes. Given women's roles as mothers and caregivers and their supportive and emotional qualities, nursing has traditionally been associated with women.¹ Nursing is a profession historically feminized due to its caregiving nature. From the era of Florence Nightingale to the present day, nursing has been widely perceived as a female-dominated profession.²

However, throughout history, the nursing profession has not always been primarily performed by women. Before the 1800s and the time of Florence Nightingale, men provided care to wounded soldiers in the military, especially.³ Men also participated in nursing care within the Byzantine Empire before the Christian era. During that period, hospitals were among the institutions where nursing emerged as a distinct and male-led profession.⁴ During the First World War (1914-1918), male nurses took on roles in caring for and treating the wounded at the frontlines. Similarly, in the Second World War (1939-1945), many male nurses served in areas where women were not permitted to enter.³

Starting in the 1960s, and particularly over the past 20 years, gender equality has been promoted in nursing education and employment; however, it has yet to reach a desired level.³ While the percentage of male nurses in the United States was 2.7% in the nursing workforce in 1970,⁵ this figure has grown to 13% today.⁶ According to the World Health Organization's *The State of the World's Nursing 2020* report, male nurses represent 11% of the workforce in South-East Asia and Europe, 24% in Africa, 22% in the Eastern Mediterranean, and 5% in the Western Pacific.⁶ However, caregiving is culturally seen as

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a female role in East Asian countries, where the proportion of male nurses is low, with 6.2% in Japan and 2.1% in China.⁷

Although the number of male nurses is increasing, it has not yet reached a desirable level.⁸ Many gender-related cultural and social differences and prejudices present significant obstacles which can in turn lead male nurses to face exclusion and challenging experiences in the workplace.^{2,9,10} Portrayals of male nurses as either homosexual or comedic figures, especially in social media, along with pervasive social prejudices, are cited as major factors deterring men from entering the profession.^{2,11}

The size and professional scope of the nursing workforce are expanding daily. However, a universal and balanced distribution of nurses worldwide has yet to be achieved. Although nurses make up approximately 59% of health professionals globally, their numbers are insufficient to meet the growing demand.⁶ Due to the worldwide shortage of nurses, the rise in chronic diseases, and an aging population, it is essential to encourage and support the participation of men in nursing to maintain adequate and quality nursing care.^{5-7,9,11} Male nurses bring particular advantages compared to female nurses due to their physical strength, which can be beneficial in intensive care units and operating rooms.¹² Therefore, it is important for both genders to be represented in the profession to help eliminate gender stereotypes in nursing. This study aimed to highlight the role and importance of male nurses in the nursing profession by examining both the positive and negative aspects of their presence in the workplace from the perspective of nurse managers. This study was conducted to assess (a) how nurse managers perceive the presence of male nurses, (b) the advantages and disadvantages of working with male nurses, (c) their contributions to the profession, and (d) their role in the future of nursing.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A descriptive qualitative study was conducted using transcendental phenomenology (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research [COREQ] checklist) (Supplementary File 1). Qualitative methods are well suited to study human experiences that are subjective and cannot be measured objectively.^{13,14}

Participants and Setting

A convenience sampling method was used to conduct the interviews.¹⁵ The study included nurses with a minimum of two years of experience as nurse managers. Data for this qualitative study were collected from 22 nurse managers working in a hospital located in Istanbul. Both head nurses of units and nurses in managerial positions in different units were included in the study. All clinical nurse managers at the hospital were included in the study, and interviews were conducted. Additionally, all clinical nurse managers in the hospital were women. The interviews were held in a hospital meeting room, with dates and times determined in advance. The purpose of including nurse managers in the study was to evaluate the presence of male nurses from the manager's perspective.

All interviewed nurse managers were female; the majority were married (77.27%) and held a bachelor's degree (59.09%). On average, participants had 20.80 ± 6.57 years of experience in nursing and 9.20 ± 5.85 years of experience as nurse managers.

Data Collection

The interview guide, consisting of 10 questions, was developed based on an extensive literature review¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and consultation with three faculty members experienced in qualitative methods (Table 1). Prior to the interviews, a pilot study was conducted with three randomly selected nurse managers and the interview form was finalized. Subsequently, individual, in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 22 nurse managers.¹⁹ All interviews followed the semi-structured interview guide in Turkish and were audio-recorded. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with an average duration of 51 minutes, and took place between May and December 2018. To maintain data confidentiality, interviews were recorded, analyzed individually, and were not shared with anyone outside the research team, which consisted of two researchers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics committee approval and institutional permission for the study were obtained from Bakırköy Dr. Sadi Konuk Training and Research Hospital (Approval Number: 2018-05-07, Date: 12.03.2018). Data for this qualitative study were collected from 22 nurse managers who consented to participate in the study. Participants were informed verbally and in writing about the study, and written consent was obtained. It was explained that interview data would remain confidential, not be shared with anyone, and be used solely for study purposes.

Table 1. Themes Related to Interview Questions

Could you briefly introduce yourself?

Theme 1: Perception

How do you perceive the choice of the nursing profession by male nurses?

How do patients and their relatives perceive the presence of male nurses?

Theme 2: Advantage and Theme 3: Disadvantage

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having male nurses in the nursing profession?

How do male nurses differ from female nurses in their work, if you compare them?

What are the conveniences and challenges of working with male nurses?

Theme 4: Professional Contributions

What contributions have men made to the nursing profession?

What is men's role in the nursing profession?

Theme 5: The Future Roles

Why do you think men have increasingly started to choose nursing, a profession traditionally perceived as female-dominated, in recent years?

What do you think about the future role of men in the nursing profession?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through content analysis,²⁰ following a five step process: (i) transcription of data, with repeated readings to gather primary insights; (ii) coding the initial data through line-by-line analysis; (iii) identifying and categorizing themes; (iv) reviewing relationships between themes; and (v) finalizing the analysis and compiling the report.¹⁴ In the final step, similarities and differences between groups of codes were connected, compared, and organized into 15 sub-themes and five main themes (Table 2). The interviews with participants were labeled as Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 3, and so on.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

The content of the transcribed recordings and analysis results were individually confirmed by each participant. The results of the qualitative content analysis for each interview were carefully reviewed by the research team every two weeks. There was strong inter-observer agreement ($\kappa=0.67$). The day after each interview, participants were asked to confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their comments, ensuring dependability.^{20,21}

Results

From the interviews conducted with the nurse managers, five main themes and 15 subthemes emerged (Table 2).

Theme 1: Perception

Subtheme 1.1: Gendered Prejudiced Attitudes

All nurse managers noted that female patients, in particular, exhibited a prejudiced attitude toward male nurses. The manager nurses shared statements such as: *“Especially young and aware female patients react unfavorably toward male nurses providing care”*

(Interview 6), *“Some patients may be conscious, others may not. We take extra precautions to ensure that female nurses are assigned to conscious female patients and male nurses to male patients. We do not want any harm to come to the patients; however, we still want to make sure that they receive the best possible care”* (Interview 2), and *“In general, female patients react negatively toward male nurses who are not the same gender as them. For instance, they do not want male nurses to give them injections or insert catheters”* (Interview 22).

Subtheme 1.2: Social Need

All nurse managers described the presence of male nurses as a social need, given that patients are of both genders. They expressed this with statements such as: *“While we do not discriminate by gender, from the standpoint of patient privacy, female patients prefer to receive care from female nurses, and male patients prefer care from male nurses. The presence of male nurses is a social need”* (Interview 1), and *“As with physicians, both genders should be represented in the nursing profession, as patients are of both genders”* (Interview 12). Another manager added, *“The presence of male nurses provides balance in the work environment. Moreover, male patients, in particular, perceive them positively and are satisfied with their presence”* (Interview 20).

Subtheme 1.3: Being Perceived as a Physician

In the study, all nurse managers noted that patients and their families often perceived male nurses as physicians due to their gender, leading them to act beyond their job descriptions. The nurse managers explained this perception with statements like: *“Patients or their relatives often mistake male nurses for physicians or think of them as superior to female nurses, and therefore show more respect toward them”* (Interview 5), and *“Patients treat male nurses as though they are doctors. They therefore receive more respect. At the same time, this can cause conflicts with female colleagues”* (Interview 9). Another nurse manager described this situation as follows: *“Male nurses are often confused with doctors. One night, two of our male nurses were on night shift, and patients and their relatives kept asking if there were any nurses on duty at the time; the male nurses responded by saying the nurses were on leave. Until the situation was clarified, no patient or relative approached the nurse counter throughout the shift”* (Interview 11).

Theme 2: Advantage

Subtheme 2.1: Fewer Responsibilities in Private Life

All nurse managers reported that male nurses generally have fewer responsibilities in private life and make fewer personal demands. They described this with statements such as: *“It is much easier working with male nurses because they have fewer responsibilities in social life outside of work”* (Interview 7), *“Male nurses do not have many personal demands. Since they prioritize earning a living for the family, they focus on their careers and work, and arrange their social lives around that. However, female nurses often try to arrange their professional lives around their personal lives, as their household responsibilities as mothers or women are substantial”* (Interview 3), and *“It is much easier working with men. They have fewer personal demands because they have fewer responsibilities in their private lives. For example, they do not resist when a shift schedule is made where they work every other day according to a monthly roster”* (Interview 15).

Subtheme 2.2: Not Being a Mother/Woman

All nurse managers expressed that working with male nurses is easier because they are not mothers. They stated this as follows: *“It is much*

Themes	Subthemes
Perception	Gendered Prejudiced Attitudes
	Social Need
	Being Perceived as a Physician
Advantage	Few Responsibilities in Private Life
	Not Being a Mother/Woman
	High Muscle/Physical Strength
Disadvantage	Lack of Meticulousness
	Dislike of Paperwork
	Being Rebellious/Prone to Conflict
	Difficulty in Empathizing
Professional Contributions	Reducing Conflicts in the Work Environment
	Reducing the Level of Violence Experienced by Healthcare Professionals
	Enhancing the Occupational Image and Sense of Security
The Future Roles	Distancing from the Work Area
	Ease of Employment and Economic Factors

easier and simpler working with male nurses because they do not need breast-feeding leave, do not have menstrual cycles, or maternity leave. They only need to take time off for completing military service or to get married” (Interview 8), “Working with male nurses is easier. You have to be extra careful when scheduling shifts for female nurses, especially if they are married and/or have children. For instance, if their child falls ill, you have to grant them leave” (Interview 18), and “If a female nurse has children, she may not want to work night shifts, and it is unfair to assign all night shifts to younger nurses. At that point, the presence of male nurses is advantageous and makes things easier” (Interview 21).

Subtheme 2.3: High Muscle/Physical Strength

All nurse managers highlighted that male nurses are particularly essential in units requiring physical strength. They described this need as follows: “Male nurses are essential in the orthopedics department. They should be assigned more physically demanding tasks. The presence of female and male nurses should be balanced equally” (Interview 17), “I think that male nurses should work in all departments, especially in emergency and intensive care units, given that both require significant physical exertion” (Interview 10), and “Male nurses should definitely be assigned to intensive care units because the work there is very physically demanding” (Interview 16).

Theme 3: Disadvantage

Subtheme 3.1: Lack of Meticulousness

All nurse managers noted that male nurses tend to be less detail-oriented and meticulous compared to their female colleagues and that they tend to adopt a more relaxed approach to their work. The nurse managers described this situation with the following sentences: “Male nurses are not as scrupulous as female nurses. They tend to have a more relaxed attitude toward keeping their work environment clean and organized” (Interview 14), “You won’t find the men being as detail-oriented and sensitive in their approach to patients” (Interview 1), and “Male nurses tend to take things a bit easier than their female colleagues. They do not pay attention to details and sometimes undermine tasks. This is a problem. In other words, unlike female nurses, they are not as obsessive and detail-oriented when it comes to patient care.” (Interview 11).

Subtheme 3.2: Dislike of Paperwork

All nurse managers noted that male nurses struggled with recording practices outside of direct nursing interventions and patient care. They expressed this situation as follows: “Male nurses dislike paperwork related to keeping records of patient interactions and practices. They are very disorganized in this area” (Interview 20), “Male nurses do not like handling patient files and records. You can ask them to treat the patient, establish vascular access, take blood, and provide nursing care, but do not expect them to document their actions” (Interview 5), and “Male nurses are very disorganized when it comes to documentation. They absolutely do not want to do this. Female nurses, on the other hand, are very organized and thorough about the importance of record-keeping and follow-up” (Interview 15).

Subtheme 3.3: Being Rebellious/Prone to Conflict

All participants indicated that male nurses tended to have a more rebellious personality than female nurses and were more prone to conflicts. They described this situation as follows: “Female nurses are more harmonious. Male nurses have a somewhat rebellious personality. They do not like being pushed and can react strongly against

discipline and any decisions made” (Interview 13), and “The biggest problem in working with male nurses is their tendency to think with simple logic, as well as their propensity for conflict, as they may misinterpret matter instead of understanding them fully” (Interview 17).

Subtheme 3.4: Difficulty in Empathizing

All nurse managers noted that another disadvantage of working with male nurses is that they tend to focus solely on their work-related duties without empathizing with patients in the clinical setting. They described this as follows: “Male nurses have difficulty empathizing with patients. Female nurses show more tolerance toward patients, but male nurses often show little to no empathy. They may act without considering whether they might emotionally hurt the patient or be misinterpreted, which can be perceived negatively by patients” (Interview 10), and “Male nurses work without considering the emotional dimension of their actions in the workplace or empathizing. They approach patients solely with a sense of duty and responsibility” (Interview 7).

Theme 4: Professional Contributions

Subtheme 4.1: Reducing Conflicts in the Work Environment

All nurse managers observed that the presence of male nurses seems to reduce conflicts among the female nurses within the units and to enhance communication. They described this with statements such as: “In the past, verbal conflicts among female employees escalated to the point where very unkind things were said. However, since men have started entering the profession, I observe fewer conflicts, and everyone reacts in a more controlled and limited way (Interview 2)”. “It is more enjoyable to work in a mixed-gender environment as both staff and manager. When all staff members are either female or male, conflicts can arise over time, and people may behave inappropriately. When both genders work side by the side, everyone acts more respectfully toward one another and is more mindful of their behavior and words” (Interview 14). “I appreciate the presence of men in my unit because they bring a sense of gender balance among female nurses, other healthcare professionals, and patients. Above all, this reduces conflicts and enhances communication” (Interview 9).

Subtheme 4.2: Reducing the Level of Violence Experienced by Healthcare Professionals

All nurse managers viewed the presence of male nurses as a protector factor for female nurses in reducing violence against healthcare professionals. They expressed this sentiment as follows: “Male nurses seem to slightly reduce the amount of violence that healthcare professionals are exposed to” (Interview 4), and “Male nurses tend to act more boldly. If one of our employees is caught in a violent situation, the men may step forward, intervene, and protect them” (Interview 6).

Subtheme 4.3: Enhancing the Occupational Image and Sense of Security

All nurse managers stated that the presence of male nurses positively affects the occupational image of nursing and increases the self-confidence of female nurses. They described this impact as follows: “I think that male nurses are essential; they have contributed tremendously to the profession. Their presence in the units positively affects society’s view of the profession and brings a sense of tranquility to the work environment” (Interview 18). “I believe that the presence of male nurses has reshaped the occupational status, perspective on the profession, and interpersonal relations. They have significantly contributed by changing how society views the profession and by

affirming that nursing is not a profession only for women" (Interview 16). *"In patriarchal societies like ours, female-dominated professions tend to be looked down upon, or women are treated as sexual objects. However, when both genders work within the same profession, the social image improves, and there is a stronger sense of authority in the healthcare sector"* (Interview 17).

Theme 5: The Future Roles

Only one nurse manager suggested that male nurses might move away from direct patient care into desk or managerial roles. In contrast, the vast majority (21 out of 22 nurse managers) believed that the presence of male nurses would gradually increase in the work area due to ease of employment.

Subtheme 5.1: Distancing from the Work Area

One manager expressed this perspective as follows: *"I believe that male nurses will, over time, distance themselves from direct patient care and switch to desk work or managerial positions, as they are gradually attempting to do so. However, they absolutely should remain in the work area"* (Interview 2).

Subtheme 5.2: Ease of Employment and Economic Factors

A total of 95.45% of managers indicated that the presence of male nurses is likely to increase due to ease of employment and economic factors: *"Society used to view nursing as a women's occupation. Now, people think differently and believe there should not be any gender discrimination in any profession. Given that nursing is seen as a high-paying job with employment security, the number of men in this profession will gradually increase"* (Interview 11). *"I think the main reason men choose this profession is economic. There is a significant shortage of nurses worldwide, which makes it easy for nurses to find employment. Of course, there are those who genuinely choose and are committed to this profession. Their numbers are notable and will continue to grow over time"* (Interview 21).

Discussion

Although nursing has traditionally been perceived as a "women's profession" for many years,¹⁷ an increasing number of men are now entering the field due to rising healthcare demands, a global shortage of nurses, the need for job security, and the career opportunities nursing offers.^{22,23}

Nevertheless, gender-based prejudiced attitudes in society have led male nurses to experience difficulties in both their professional and student lives.²¹ Similar to the findings of this study, social gender-based biases lead female patients to avoid receiving treatment from male nurses, especially in specialized hospital units such as obstetrics and gynecology, intensive care, and pediatrics.^{1,24} Additionally, some male nurses report feeling that female patients may be uncomfortable in their presence while receiving care, and they worry about the possibility of accusations regarding patient privacy.^{1,25} As a result, it is important to raise social awareness to minimize gender-biased attitudes toward the nursing profession. Furthermore, promoting the understanding that all professions can be pursued by both genders is important.

As found in this study, it has also been reported that male nurses are sometimes perceived as physicians due to their gender.^{2,10} Additionally, some patients, believing that male nurses are superior to

their female colleagues, direct their questions to male nurses rather than female ones. Such situations have led to conflicts between male and female nurses.^{2,4} Therefore, raising social awareness is important to minimize gender discrimination and patriarchal attitudes within the nursing profession, as in all professions. Society should also be made aware that there is no gender discrimination in health professions and that both genders have equal rights in practicing their profession.

As highlighted in the study results, the presence of male nurses in the profession provides substantial support, especially in units that require significant physical strength.^{10,23} It has been observed that male nurses are often more preferred in the private sector, as they do not need to pause their careers for motherhood-related responsibilities and are available to take on a larger workload.⁴ As a result, it can be concluded that male nurses' presence in the nursing profession is necessary, both because they can contribute more effectively in physically demanding areas and because they have fewer social responsibilities in their private lives.

Despite the fact that female nurses are generally preferred over their male colleagues, it has been reported that patients, regardless of gender, prefer to receive care from well-mannered and considerate male nurses rather than from ill-tempered female nurses.² Another study found that patients were very satisfied with the care provided by male nurses, perceiving them as affable and sensitive. Additionally, 89% of patients expressed that male nurses enhanced the quality of care, created a suitable environment for care, and fostered a positive work atmosphere.²⁶ Based on the study results, it can be stated that the presence of both men and women in the nursing profession enhances the quality of nursing care and creates a positive working environment by reducing destructive conflicts.

In line with the study results, other studies have also reported that the presence of male nurses in clinical settings enhances communication and strengthens and strengthens group dynamics, which in turn positively affects the quality of care provided by staff.^{1,19} Additionally, male nurses are often preferred for managerial positions because of their strong desire for leadership, power, and status, and they are perceived as symbols of authority and strength.^{10,27} However, given that the nursing workforce is still predominantly female and that gender perceptions persist, it is important to shape nursing policies regarding education, working conditions, equal treatment, participation in decision-making, and leadership.⁶ In conclusion, the presence of male nurses in the profession enhances its professional image and positively contributes to the field's development. This also suggests that nursing will increasingly become a preferred profession for men, as it offers ample job opportunities and career advancement. The preference for male nurses in management positions, in particular, may make nursing an attractive career choice for men.

Limitation of the Study

The study is limited by the small number of qualitative studies that explore nurse managers' views on working with male nurses. Additionally, since this study was conducted in a single country and city, its results may lack generalizability. Furthermore, the fact that all clinical nurse managers included in the study were women represents another limitation.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the presence of male nurses in the profession is both supported and viewed as a social necessity, especially in units that require intense labor and physical strength. However, to reduce gender-based stereotypes and prevent male nurses from being mistaken for physicians, it is important to organize nationwide initiatives or seminars to raise public awareness, supported by media and social media campaigns. Additionally, open communication with male nurses is essential to prevent conflicts, emphasize the importance of thorough documentation, and encourage empathy toward patients.

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Informed Consent: Verbal and written informed consent was obtained from the nurses who agreed to take part in the study.

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