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PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT IN NURSING STUDENTS AND AFFECTING FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study was carried out descriptively to determine the factors affecting professional self-concept in nursing students.

Methods: This descriptive study was conducted with 398 students who were studying at 1st and 2nd years of nursing education in three universities located in Turkey. Data of the study were collected by Student Information Form and Professional Self-Concept Inventory in Student Nurses (PSCISN). Descriptive statistics, chi square test, independent samples t test, one way anova test and pearson correlation were used to assess data.

Results: Mean scores of the students who voluntarily selected nursing profession and who were interested in the profession from total PSCISN and subscales were found to be significantly higher ($p<0.05$). Mean scores of the students studying in private universities from professional satisfaction and professional competence were found to be significantly higher than the ones who were studying in the state university ($p<0.05$). Mean score of the female students from professional attributes was significantly higher than the males ($p<0.005$). The positive correlations between mean total PSCISN and subscale scores were found to be statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: Having an interest on nursing profession, preferring it voluntarily and feeling professional satisfaction positively affects professional self-concept in nursing students. It may be suggested to measure professional satisfaction of the nursing students during their educational lives by the teaching staff. Students whose professional satisfaction level decreases throughout their educational life can be intervened by this implementation. This intervention may allow students to prepare for their professional life after graduation.

Key Words: Self-Concept, Nursing Students, Professional

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional self is an important aspect in nursing practices and professionalisation of nursing (Oner et al., 2019; Deppoliti, 2008; McKenna et al., 2004). Professional self-concept needs to be developed in the nurses for nursing to become a professional occupation (Brown et al., 2003).

Fagermoen (1997) described professional self as values and beliefs owned by the nurses which guide their interactions with patients, actions and way of thinking (Fagermoen, 1997). Development of professional self is a process continuing during education and occupational life (Oner et al., 2019). Within this process, insufficient development or lack of professional identity among nursing students cause serious problems (Costello, 2004). The conditions such as the differences in motivation levels of the students regarding the profession, problems originated from theoretical education and clinical practice, image of the profession within the society and professional autonomy problem in the healthcare system may create serious barriers in front of the development of a professional self (Öner et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2013). As a result of these factors, some problems may occur such as starting professional life with a lower motivation, inability to comment in professional life, inadequacy in meeting accepted standards of the profession, inability to

fulfill the role of nursing successfully, decrease in self-confidence and exhaustion (Sabancıoğulları et al.,2014; İlhan et al., 2016).

The aim of nursing education is to make students gain features of professional nursing and prepare them for their future professional experiences (Alan et al.,2015).

The factors affecting the development of professional self-concept by the students are learning gained from occupational education, recognition of nursing values, professional experiences, integration of nursing philosophy with own philosophy, having a professional responsibility, integration of nursing with personal identity and interactions with teaching staff and clinical teachers (Altrok,2016). It has been indicated that professional satisfaction increases and exhaustion and job quits decrease when a positive professional self is developed during educational process (Branch,2000). Evaluation of professional self-concept among student nurses will provide the development of professional roles of the students by enabling us as educators to develop professional self-concept during education and to assess the success of the attempts to achieve this. The studies on this subject were mostly found to focus on professional self-concept of last year nursing students (Oner et al., 2019; Cowin et al., 2013). In this study, it was aimed to make suggestions for the teaching processes of nursing students to develop professional self-concept by focusing on the professional self-concept and affecting factors during the first years of nursing education. With this approach, teaching staff of nursing departments will have the opportunity to make efforts for making nursing students to develop professional self-concept before graduation. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate professional self-concept levels of nursing students and affecting factors.

2. METHOD

This study was carried out descriptively to determine the factors affecting professional self-concept of nursing students.

2.1. Sample

The study was conducted with 398 students who were studying at 1st and 2nd years of nursing education in three universities (one state and two private universities) located in Turkey during 2014-2015 fall term. A total of 48 students who were absent during the dates of data collection or who did not fill in the questionnaire form completely were excluded from the study. No student rejected to participate in the study.

2.2. Data Collection

Data of the study were collected by Student Information Form and Professional Self-Concept Inventory in Student Nurses (PSCISN).

2.2.1. Student Information Form

This form consisted of 9 questions to determine university type, age, school year, sex, family type, income states of nursing students, their states of working, their states of selecting nursing profession voluntarily and their reasons for selecting this profession.

2.2.2. Professional Self-Concept Inventory in Student Nurses (PSCISN)

The development and validity and reliability study of Professional Self-Concept Inventory in Student Nurses (PSCISN) were carried out by Sabancıoğulları&Dogan (2011); and included 45 items. The inventory has a 4-point Likert type grading (“1”=totally disagree, “2”=disagree, “3”=agree and “4”=totally agree); and total score that can be obtained from the inventory varies between 45-180. There are 3 subscales of PSCISN (Sabancıoğulları et al., 2011).

1. Professional Satisfaction refers to professional satisfaction of student nurses. Mean score of this subscale varies between 8-32.
2. Professional Competence refers to self-evaluation for the professional qualifications required to fulfill nursing profession (such as problem solving skill, decision making skill, professional knowledge and skill, professional competence). Mean score of this subscale varies between 7-28.
3. Professional Attributes refers to the qualifications of the profession; and emotions, thoughts and beliefs regarding the fulfillment of these qualifications. Mean score of this subscale varies between 30-120.



High scores obtained from PSCISN and its subscales indicate that professional self-concept of the nurses developed positively (Oner et al., 2019).

2.3. Data Analysis

Analysis of data was performed by using SPSS 21.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) package program. Normality distribution of data was analyzed by Shapiro-Wilk test. Chi square test, Independent samples t test, One way Anova Test and Pearson correlation analysis were used to assess data. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was accepted as statistically significant for comparisons.

2.4. Ethical Aspect

Data were collected in the classrooms of the students during the study. Researchers explained the purpose of the study before collecting the data and participation was on a voluntary basis.

The study was carried out based on the ethical principles of Helsinki Declaration. The study was started after getting an authorization from the institution and verbal consent from the students.

3. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table-1. Descriptive characteristics of the students

Descriptive characteristics	n	%
University type		
State	218	54.8
Private	180	45.2
Study year		
1st year	241	60.6
2nd year	157	39.4
Sex		
Female	334	83.9
Male	64	16.1
Age (years)		
≤ 20	270	67.8
≥ 21	128	32.2
Mean age (years)	19.9 \pm 1.1	
Family type		
Core	326	81.9
Large	61	15.3
Broken	11	2.8
Income status		
Good	88	22.1
Moderate	298	74.9
Poor	12	3.0
Status of working		
No	379	95.2
Yes	19	4.8

Out of the nursing students included in the study, 54.8% were studying in a state university and 60.6% were studying at first year. 83.8% of the students were females, 67.8% were 20 years and younger and mean age was 19.9 \pm 1.1 years old (min:18, max:24). 81.9% of the students had a core family; 74.9% of them had an income status of moderate level and 95.2% were not working outside the school (Table-1).

Table-2. Students' characteristics regarding the preference of nursing profession

Descriptive characteristics	n	%
Status of selecting nursing profession voluntarily		
Yes	258	64.8
No	140	35.2
Reason for preferring nursing profession		
More job opportunities	245	61.6
Interest on nursing	102	25.6
University examination score	20	5.0
Family	31	7.8

64.8% of the students stated that they voluntarily selected nursing profession and 25.6% stated that they selected since they were interested in nursing. 61.6% declared that they preferred this profession due to the presence of more job opportunities (Table-2).

It was also determined that 53.1% of the students who voluntarily selected the profession were studying in private universities and 69.3% of them were studying in the state university; and the difference between groups was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2= 18.360$, $p<0.001$). Moreover, it was found that 56.9% of the students who selected due to their interest on nursing profession were studying in private universities and 58.8% were studying in a state university ($\chi^2= 7.497$, $p<0.005$). No statistically significant differences were found between nursing students' sex, income status, family type and age group and their states of choosing the nursing profession voluntarily and having an interest on nursing profession ($p>0.05$).

Mean total score of the students from PSCISN was found to be 135.1 ± 14.9 (min=83.0-max=171.0); and the mean scores of the subscales were found as 22.4 ± 3.8 (min=10.0-max=31.0) for professional satisfaction, 20.1 ± 3.3 (min=7.0-max= 28.0) for professional competence and 92.5 ± 10.4 (min=54.0-max= 116.0) for professional attributes.

Table-3. Distribution of descriptive and professional characteristics of the students based on their mean scores from PSCISN and its subscales

	PSCISN subscales			PSCISN Total Mean \pm SD
	Professional satisfaction Mean \pm SD	Professional competence Mean \pm SD	Professional attributes Mean \pm SD	
University type				
State	22.0 \pm 3.8	19.6 \pm 3.3	92.7 \pm 10.2	134.5 \pm 14.5
Private	22.8 \pm 3.8	20.6 \pm 3.3	92.2 \pm 10.6	135.8 \pm 15.2
t	2.000	2.963	-0.486	0.842
p	0.046	0.003	0.627	0.401
Sex				
Female	22.3 \pm 3.7	20.0 \pm 3.2	93.2 \pm 10.2	135.6 \pm 14.7
Male	22.5 \pm 4.0	20.7 \pm 3.8	89.0 \pm 10.5	132.2 \pm 15.6
t	.342	1.467	-3.016	-1.670
p	.732	.143	.003	.096
Status of selecting nursing profession voluntarily				
Yes	23.3 \pm 3.5	20.4 \pm 3.1	93.3 \pm 10.1	137.2 \pm 14.5
No	20.6 \pm 3.6	19.5 \pm 3.7	91.0 \pm 10.8	131.2 \pm 14.8
t	7.138	2.565	2.143	3.901
p	.000	.011	.033	.000
Reason of preference				
Interest on nursing	23.9 \pm 3.8	20.9 \pm 3.1	95.8 \pm 9.7	140.7 \pm 14.3
Other reasons (job opportunities, family university examination score)	21.8 \pm 3.6	19.8 \pm 3.4	91.4 \pm 10.4	133.1 \pm 14.5
t	-4.767	-2.982	-3.724	-4.538
p	.000	.003	.000	.000

As seen in Table-3, mean scores of the students studying in private universities from the subscales of professional satisfaction and professional competence were found to be significantly higher than the ones who were studying in the state university ($p<0.05$). Also, mean score of the female students from professional attributes was significantly higher than the males ($p<0.005$).

Mean scores of the students who voluntarily selected nursing profession and who were interested in the profession from total scale and subscales were found to be higher at a statistically significant level ($p<0.05$) (Table-3).

The differences between total PSCISN score and subscale scores based on the class, age group, family type, income status and state of working outside the school were not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

Table-4. The correlations between total PSCISN and subscale scores of the students

PSCISN Subscales	Professional satisfaction	Professional competence	Professional attributes	PSCISN Total
Professional satisfaction				
r	-	0.371	0.479	0.677
p	-	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Professional competence				
r	-	-	0.555	0.711
p	-	-	<0.001	<0.001
Professional attributes				
r	-	-	-	0.949
p	-	-	-	<0.001

In this study, the positive correlations between mean total PSCISN and subscale scores of nursing students were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) (Table-4).

In this study that was carried out to identify the factors affecting professional self-concept of nursing students, mean total PSCISN and all mean subscale scores of the students were found in the relevant studies are similar to our results (Oner et al., 2019, Çam et al., 2018; Karabulutlu Yılmaz et al., 2019; Ak et al., 2018).

It has been determined that two most important factors affecting professional self-concept in nursing students are having an interest on nursing profession and selecting the profession voluntarily. In our study, more than half of the nursing students stated that they voluntarily selected nursing profession (Table-2). Similarly, 66.7% of the students were reported to select nursing profession voluntarily in the study by Karatepe Kuscu et al. (Karatepe et al., 2019).

In this study, it was found that mean total score of the scale and mean scores of professional competence and attributes were significantly increased as mean score of professional satisfaction increased ($p < 0.001$) (Table-4). Again in this study, total PSCISN and subscale scores of the students who selected nursing profession voluntarily and preferred due to their interest were found to be higher at a statistically significant level ($p < 0.05$) (Table-3). Similarly, in the study by Cevik and Khorshid, professional behavior scores of the students who selected the nursing profession voluntarily were determined to be high. Moreover, professional attitude levels of the students who were satisfied with nursing education (116.13 ± 13.22) and who preferred nursing profession on their own will (117.06 ± 14.02) were reported to be higher in the study by Ak et al., and there are also studies in the literature reporting similar results to our study (Ak et al., 2018, Dikmen et al., 2016; Çevik et al., 2012; Lacobucci et al., 2012; Bang et al., 2011).

In the study, mean scores of the students studying in private universities from professional satisfaction and professional competence were found to be significantly higher than the students studying in the state university ($p < 0.05$). Again in this study, it was seen that students in private universities selected nursing profession voluntarily and preferred due to their interest at a higher ratio than the students studying in the state university ($p < 0.05$). This finding may explain the fact that professionalism aspect of the students studying in a private university is more positive. In addition to this, state universities provide free education whereas private universities provide paid education in Turkey. The students who preferred private universities might have accepted to get education in this department by paying a fee since they were interested in nursing profession. Another reason of this situation might be less number of students in the private universities and the fact that their teaching staff had the opportunity to take care of the students one by one.

Preferring the profession voluntarily enables students to be more successful both in student life and in professional life, to perform profession willingly, to internalize the profession and to develop their professional knowledge and skills; and thus, positively contributes to create a positive self-esteem and to become more professional (Pınar et al., 2013). In addition, professionalism levels of the nursing students were indicated to be at a low level in some studies as different to ours (Bang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2008). The reason of the difference in the professionalism level of the students is thought to be derived from the lack of standardization in nursing education. In the study by Kim, decrease in the self-esteem of the students was stated to be associated with the shock that they experienced in clinical practice (Kim, 2020). This may be explained with the inadequacy of education at school in preparing student for

field experience. High self-esteem found in the studies and also in our study may be associated with the first years of education whereas low esteem may be linked to more field experiences at last year. This situation can be overcome by providing more educator support in the field through instructing students about adversities to be experienced and giving them a special training (Arkan et al., 2018; Valiee et al., 2016). Some studies reported no significant differences between classes in professional self perception (Hensel et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2007).

Mean score of the female students from professional attributes were found to be significantly higher than the male students ($p < 0.005$). This result was in accordance with the results of the previous studies (Oner et al., 2019; Çam et al., 2018; Ak et al., 2018; Bang et al., 2011; Koç et al., 2010; Titrek et al., 2015). This outcome may be associated with the perception of the society regarding the image of the profession. Although males have been included in nursing profession for the last 13 years in Turkey, perspective of the society affects male nurses and student male nurses. Individuals with an improved self-confidence and positive self-concept can reveal their own existence within the social structure (Çam et al., 2017). Having self-confidence may help students to enter professional nurse role more easily. When evaluated accordingly, attitudes and educational environment empowering the student's self may provide a significant contribution especially for male students during education (Kelly et al., 2007). Also a recent study reported that academic success of the students was associated with professional self-concept (Yoo et al., 2019). Based on this result, it may be suggested to address academic success as a variable in the future studies.

3.1. Limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study was the inclusion of only first and second year nursing students.

4. CONCLUSION

Having an interest on nursing profession, preferring it voluntarily and feeling professional satisfaction positively affects professional self-concept in nursing students. In this study, it was found that being interested in nursing profession and selecting nursing profession voluntarily affected professional self-concept at a statistically significant level. Moreover, it was found that professional satisfaction level of nursing students created a positive and significant correlation with total PSCISN and subscales of professional attributes and professional competence.

5. RECOMMENT

Considering that professional satisfaction level of the students is directly associated with the other aspects of professional self-concept, it may be suggested to measure professional satisfaction of the nursing students and affecting factors during their educational lives by the teaching staff. Students whose professional satisfaction level decreases throughout their educational life can be intervened by this implementation. This intervention may allow students to prepare for their professional life after graduation.

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