

Investigation of Nursing Student's Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Their Profession During the COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Due to COVID-19, it is thought that nursing students' perceptions and attitudes toward the nursing profession have changed nowadays.

Materials and Methods: To examine the perceptions and attitudes of nursing students to their profession during COVID-19. This study was performed based on a descriptive and cross-sectional design. The universe of the study was 226 nursing students who participated in the academic year of 2020-2021, and the study was applied to 191 nursing students who agreed to participate in the research at Bazmialem Vakıf University in İstanbul. The Sociodemographic Characteristics Data Form and Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession were used to collect data.

Results: 58.1% of the students stated that they would like to work in the field as a nurse if they had graduated during the pandemic, and 41.9% of them did not want to work in this process. The rate of those who think that the COVID-19 process has negatively changed the idea of practicing their profession in the future is 11.5%, while the rate of those who think that it has not changed negatively was 88.5%. The students thought that nurses did not get the regard they deserved in this process was significantly higher ($p=0.042$).

Conclusion: Findings highlighted the need to determine the students's attitudes about their profession after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Nursing students, COVID-19, profession, attitude

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which started in Wuhan China in December 2019, was included in the category of epidemic diseases by the World Health Organization (WHO) on February 11, 2020 (1,2). In addition to its physiological effects on people, COVID-19 affected mental health during the emergence of the first case and the increase in the number of cases (3). Epidemics were seen throughout life not only affecting the living things carrying the infection, but also society

in many ways. Therefore, epidemics constitute an important problem for the whole world (1).

A nurse is a person who has completed the basic nursing education program, provides a holistic service to individuals and society, contributes to the country and society, meets the health needs of the sick individual, and raises the health level of society. Nurses, whose beginnings are based on the existence of human beings, are one of the most affected professions during the COVID-19 pandemic process (4). Nurses who work

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at the forefront of the management of the epidemic and took an active role in the care and treatment of patients. They were affected physically and psychologically by this process due to long working hours, insomnia problems, risk of infection, being away from their families, and loss of caregivers or other health workers because of the epidemic (5,6).

Today, the increasing need for nurses has increased the importance of nursing education. Accordingly, nurses who specialize in their fields, have problem-solving skills, and can think critically are needed to provide qualified care to society. The development of professional identity, which started in student life, is also provided by the education system (7). With the pandemic, serious changes have occurred in the education life of nursing students. The closure of schools, the uncertain date of reopening, and the rapid increase in the number of cases have brought uncertainty and a stressful process for students. During COVID-19, face-to-face education quickly turned to online education, and nursing students who could not go into clinical practice during this period due to pandemic bans experienced distress and low motivation (8). In a recent study conducted by Kürtüncü and Kurt (2020) with 824 nursing students, it was found that most of the students studying during the distance education period had complaints about being away from the clinic. Some of the comments from the students were that staying away from clinical practice could prevent learning (9). In another study conducted by Taş and Dalcalı (2020) with 158 nursing students, it was observed that the students were hesitant about learning their professional practices in this process. In conclusion, it was seen that the students could not perform completely learning because they have provided a better understanding of the importance of the nursing profession worldwide process has provided a better understanding of the importance of the nursing profession all over the world. Despite this, it has created different nursing students' attitudes toward the profession. With COVID-19, it has become important to question the attitudes of nursing students towards the nursing profession and to evaluate their perceptions of the nursing profession, who have witnessed the difficulties experienced by the nursing profession. So, a recent study purposed to determine nursing students' attitudes and perceptions towards the nursing profession during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and sample

This cross-sectional study was performed between January and March 2021. The population of the study consisted of 226 students at the Faculty of Health Sciences. The sample of the study was 191 nursing students who accepted to participate in the study and were selected by random sampling method. Nursing students over 18 years old with internet access students' sociodemographic characteristics and study.

Research Questions

1. What are the sociodemographic characteristics of the students and their perceptions of COVID-19?

2. What is the level of student's attitudes towards the nursing profession?

Data collection tools

Information form: This form including items on students' sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education grade, family status, income level, and seven questions about their perception of COVID-19, was used in the present study. These seven questions were made by researchers, looking at the current literature (11,12). These questions were about learning their thoughts about nursing status during the pandemic.

Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession: The Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (ASNP), created by Çoban & Kaşıkçı was used in this study to assess the thoughts of students about the nursing profession during the COVID-19. The validity and reliability of the scale (for Turkish) were made by Çoban & Kaşıkçı. The ASNP consists of 40 items and is created to measure the sub-dimensions (Characteristics of the Nursing Profession, Preferring Nursing Profession, and Attitude towards the General Situation of the Nursing Profession). Participants answer items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ('I strongly disagree') to 5 ('I totally agree'). An increase in the score obtained from the scale showed that positive attitudes to nursing increased. The reliability of the scale was estimated by examining internal consistency measures. A Cronbach's alpha of the scale was found to be 0.91. And it showed that study of its validity and reliability (13). A Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.88 was found in the present study.

Data collection

A questionnaire (online) was performed to collect data. The questionnaire existed of the information form created for our study and the ASNP. A link for the questionnaire was sent to the students via researchers (WhatsApp Inc., Menlo Park, CA), and incomplete forms were removed from the data.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22.0 program. Values for the students and their perception of COVID-19 were analyzed as numbers and percentages. Shapiro Wilk was used for the normality test. Non-parametric tests (the Mann-Whitney U test) were used to compare variables. A p-value of <0.05 was accepted for statistical significance. The results were looked at the significance level of $p < 0.05$ at a confidence interval of 95%.

Ethical Dimension

This study was accepted by one university ethics committee (E-54022451-050.01.04.6312 / 25.02.2021). For the ASNP we used in the present study, permission was obtained by e-mail from Çoban. Volunteer students who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study. Informed consent was taken from all participants via the questionnaire. On the consent page, the students were given about the purpose of the present study, their information in the study was voluntary and all personal information would be kept confidential. Throughout the study, the Declaration of Human Rights was adhered to.

RESULTS

191 students in the study were enrolled in the study. 93.2% were female, 6.8% were male, 29.8% were 2nd-grade students, and there was a relatively equal distribution of students. 91.0% of the students had a nuclear family structure, and 95.8% lived with their families. 93.7% did not work in any job, and 76.4% met their income expenses. Results indicated that 84.3% of the students consumed future anxiety, and 39.3% followed the information about COVID-19 from social media sources. It was determined that 98.4% of students found COVID-19 dangerous (Table 1).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of students (N=191)

	N	%
Age		
18-20	111	58.1
21-22	73	38.2
23-24	7	3.6
Grade		
1th	49	25.7
2nd	57	29.8
3rd	49	25.7
4th	36	18.8
Gender		
Woman	178	93.2
Man	13	6.8
Family type		
Nuclear	174	91.0
Extended	17	8.9
Income-expenditure status		
Income-expense meets	146	76.4
More than income-expenditure	20	10.4
Less than income-expenditure	25	13.0
Working status		
Yes	12	6.3
No	179	93.7
Future anxiety		
Yes	161	84.3
No	30	15.7
Information resource on COVID 19		
Social media	75	39.3
Health institution	11	5.8
Audio/visual media	105	55.0

58.1% of the students who participated in the present research stated that they would like to work in the field if they were a nurse during COVID-19. The rate of students who thought that the COVID-19 pandemic process has changed their ideas positively applying to the nursing profession was 53.4%. The rate of those who thought that the pandemic process contributed positively to the image of nursing was 80.6%, and the rate of those who thought that it did not contribute positively is 19.4%. The rate of those who thought that nursing problems were not brought to the agenda during the pandemic process was 60.7%. The rate of students who thought that the COVID-19 process has negatively changed the idea of practicing the profession in the future was 11.5%, while the rate of students who thought that their opinion has not changed negatively was 88.5%. 85.3% of the students thought that nurses did not get the worth they deserve during the Covid-19 process and 99.4% thought that nurses worked devotedly during the COVID-19 process (Table 2).

The average score on the ASNP was 157.31 ± 14.96 , indicating that the students had a moderately positive attitude to the nursing profession. The average scores for subgroups were 39.28 ± 5.46 , 36.81 ± 5.02 , and 39.28 ± 5.46 (Table 3).

There was no significant difference between the gender, class, living people, family type, number of siblings, and scale score averages of the students who participated in the research. The mean score of CNP ($p=0.028$, $Z:-2.197$) and AGSNP ($p=0.028$, $Z:-2.197$) were significantly higher in working students compared to non-working students. The score of AGSNP of students who thought that nurses did not receive the value they deserved during COVID-19 was significantly higher than the answered yes ($p=0.042$, $Z:-2.030$). Students who thought that COVID-19 did not contribute negatively to the image of nurses had a significantly higher AGSNP score than other students ($p=0.031$, $Z:-2,157$). While the mean score of AGSNP of Students who thought that they have changed their ideas (in a negative way) about practicing the COVID-19 profession in the future was significantly higher than others ($p=0.030$, $Z:-2.169$), the mean score of PNP is significantly lower ($p=0.018$, $Z:-2.358$) (Table 4).

Table 2: Students' perceptions about the nursing profession during the COVID-19 (N=191)

		n	%
I would like to be a nurse during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Yes	111	58.1
	No	80	41.9
The COVID-19 has positively changed my ideas about practicing the nursing profession in the future.	Yes	102	53.4
	No	89	46.5
I think that COVID-19 has a positive contribution to the image of nurses.	Yes	154	80.6
	No	37	19.4
I think that the problems existing in the nursing profession came to the fore during the COVID-19.	Yes	75	39.3
	No	116	60.7
The COVID-19 has negatively changed my ideas about practicing the nursing profession in the future.	Yes	22	11.5
	No	169	88.5
I think nurses get the value they deserve during COVID-19 period.	Yes	28	14.6
	No	163	85.3
I think nurses are working selflessly during the COVID-19.	Yes	190	99.4
	No	1	0.5

Table 3: Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (ASNP) Scores (N=191)

Sub dimensions	Mean±SD	Min-Max	Score Range
Characteristics of the Nursing Profession (CNP)	39.28±5.46	14.00-45.00	54 and above
Preferring the Nursing Profession (PNP)	36.81±5.02	21.00-59.00	39 and above
Attitude towards the General Situation of the Nursing Profession (AGSNP)	39.28±5.46	14.00-45.00	27 and above
ASNP Total	157.31±14.96	87.00-184.00	40-200

Table 4: Comparison of ASNP and sub-dimension mean scores according to students' perceptions (N=191)

Items	ASNP			CNP		PNP		AGSNP				
	Mean±SD	MWU	p	Mean±SD	MWU*	p	Mean±SD	MWU*	p	Mean±SD	MWU*	p
Family Type												
Nuclear	157.07±15.40			39.07±5.60			36.82±5.21			39.07±5.609		
Extended	159.71±9.31	1.456	0.918	41.41±3.00	1.405	0.733	36.76±2.35	1.448	0.888	41.41±3.001	1.108	0.087
Working status												
Yes	161.50±10.43	9285	0.432	42.08±2.84	668.5	0.028	35.83±4.13	937.5	0.460	42.08±2.843	668.5	0.028
No	157.03±15.19			39.09±5.54			36.88±5.08			39.09±5.549		
I think nurses get the value they deserve during COVID-19												
Yes	151.61±19.619	1.812	0.082	37.39±6.431	1.781	0.063	35.79±4.725	2.084	0.462	37.39±6.431	1.736	0.042
No	158.29±13.848			39.61±5.233			36.99±5.067			39.61±5.233		
I think the pandemic has a negative impact on the image of nurses.												
Yes	158.48±9.862			82.52±5.925			37.44±4.925			38.52±3.766		
No	157.12±15.656	2.125	0.738	81.00±9.369	2.161	0.843	36.71±5.048	2.017	0.458	39.28±5.463	1.642	0.031
The pandemic has negatively changed my ideas about practicing nursing in the future.												
Yes	156.95±12.963	1.718	0.564	41.23±4.197	1.699	0.512	35.18±3.361	1.331	0.018	41.23±4.197	1.286	0.030
No	157.36±15.235			39.03±5.567			37.02±5.172			39.03±5.567		

*Mann Whitney U

DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic characteristics of students

191 students participated in the study, of which 93.2% were female, and 6.8% were male. 84.3% of the students who were asked about the existence of future anxiety stated that they had future anxiety, and 15.7% stated that they did not have any future anxiety. In addition, 98.4% of the students stated that they found COVID-19 dangerous. During epidemics, nursing students often felt fear and psychological distress (12,14). For this reason, it is thought that the future anxiety and fear of COVID-19 in students increased in our study as the nursing profession is not easy under normal conditions and the pandemic made it more difficult (8). It was observed that most of the students chose audio/visual media as the source of accessing information about the pandemic. This shows that the students ignore the unverified information that is too social, which shows that their critical thinking and social media literacy are in good condition (15).

Students' Perceptions of the COVID-19

In our study, the students who said that the pandemic process contributed positively to the image of nursing (80.6%) and that Covid-19 pandemic process changed their ideas about applying to nursing positively (53.4%). With these results, it is seen that students realize the real value and importance of

nursing through crisis experience, as well as the reality of the high risks of the nursing profession (11,15). In addition, the rate of those who think that nursing problems are not on the agenda during the pandemic (60.7%), nurses do not receive the value they deserve during the Covid-19 process (85.3%), and that nurses work devotedly (99.4%) were high.

Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (ASNP) Scores

In the study, the ASNP score average was found to be high. The high ASNP score average indicates positive attitudes to the profession (13). Like the results we found, in the study of Seval and Sönmez (2018) conducted in our country, the mean score of the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession and the mean scores of all sub-dimensions were found to be high (16). Similar results were obtained in the study conducted by Miligi and Selim (2014) (17). With these results, it is said that the COVID-19 process did not negatively change the attitudes of nursing students toward the nursing profession. When we look at the studies on working nurses, Tarhan et al. (2016) reported that the ASNP score average and sub-dimension mean score was also high (18). In the study of Çoban and Yurdagül (2014), another study in which the same scale was used, on working nurses, the ASNP score average and sub-dimension mean score was reported to be low (19). It is thought that the reason why this research finding is different from the research findings mentioned above may be because only nurses who care for

cancer patients in medical and radiation oncology clinics were included in the study.

Comparison of ASNP and sub-dimension mean scores according to students' perceptions

According to the working status, the average score of the working students and the average score of AGSNP are significantly higher than the students who are not working. It is thought that working status reduces students' fears and increases their attitudes toward positive the nursing profession (15). Those who did not tell that nurses received the value they deserved during COVID-19 were significantly higher than those who thought they did. In this case, nursing students think that the nursing profession should be valued more. We think that this situation affected the students' ideas of working as nurses after graduation because nurses do not see the value they deserve in the health system during COVID-19 (20). Students who think that the COVID-19 process does not contribute negatively to the nursing image have a significantly higher AGSNP score average than students who think that it does. It is thought that this increasing image also increases the commitment of nursing students toward the profession. According to a similar study by Taş and Dalcalı (2021), students (24.7%) who think that their motivation is positively affected during COVID-19, think that the importance of their profession is understood during COVID-19 (10). Students who think that their ideas about practicing the nursing profession during Covid-19 have changed (negatively), compared to students who think that they have not changed negatively, while the mean score of AGSNP is significantly higher, while the mean score of PNP was significantly lower. In the study conducted by Birimoğlu Okuyan et al. (2020), a significant difference was got between the mean scores of nursing students' fear of contagion due to the epidemic, fear of death, future anxiety, and health anxiety (21). According to another study, in addition to students' academic anxiety, the fear of being infected also caused a significant increase in anxiety levels during the pandemic (22). This situation makes us think that students want to work in general, but they do not prefer to work during the pandemic process.

CONCLUSION

Although the nursing students told that nurses could not get their worth even though they worked devotedly, it was revealed that their attitudes to their profession were positive. However, the fact that some nursing students were told that nurses could not get the worth they deserved during COVID-19 negatively affected their views on doing the profession in the future and their look in the future. However, students' understanding of the value of their profession and realizing the good aspects of the profession have affected their attitudes toward the profession positively. In addition, it was revealed that they thought that the COVID-19 process had a positive effect on the image of the profession. In this process, it was understood that the students working in any job were positive towards the profession. Based on these results, it is recommended that nursing should improve their working conditions, especially in

crises for nursing students' attitudes towards the profession to develop positively. Since the study, which is included in the limitations of our research, is only for nursing students, it is recommended to conduct the study with nurses working in the clinical field and get their opinions to inspire future researchers.

Strengths and limitations

The strength of this study is to use of online links to collect data. It was fast to reach students. Limitation, participation was voluntary, and the election could make a bias.

Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by the ethics committee of

Informed Consent: Written consent was obtained from the participants.

Peer Review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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