

Nursing Between the Lines: The Social Reflection of the Profession in the Turkish Press (1929–1954)

Esra Sezer¹, Hilal Yıldız Çelik¹, Ozan Acar¹

¹ Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar
University, Faculty of Health Sciences,
Department of Nursing,
Istanbul, Türkiye

Esra SEZER
0000-0002-5310-2575
Hilal YILDIZ ÇELİK
0000-0003-4821-0245
Ozan ACAR
0000-0002-1721-7842

Correspondence: Esra Sezer
Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of
Nursing, Istanbul, Türkiye
Phone: +90 216 500 41 73
E-mail: esra.sezer@acibadem.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the social discourse and representations of the nursing profession in Türkiye between 1929 and 1954.

Methods: This qualitative study used data from the Muteferriqa Digital Newspaper Archive covering newspapers published between 1929 and 1954. Historical document analysis and critical discourse analysis were applied concurrently. A total of 782 newspaper issues were screened and 126 news items meeting inclusion criteria were analyzed. Coding was conducted independently by three researchers and discursive patterns were synthesized under four period-based thematic clusters.

Results: Representations of nursing were structured around four discursive clusters. During the 1930s, nursing was portrayed as a domain of “moral service” and a “marker of civilization” aligned with the Republic’s modernization project, with care work linked to compassion and national responsibility. In 1939–1945, discourse became markedly militarized, framing nursing through notions such as “the health army” and “service to the nation.” Between 1946 and 1950, professionalization emerged through extended training programs and strengthened medical curricula. By 1950–1954, nursing gained heightened public visibility through World Nurses Day celebrations, representing the profession both as a modern field of expertise and as a role linked to emotional labor and ideals of service.

Conclusion: Early Republican press discourse portrayed nursing as a multilayered construct in which professionalization narratives coexisted with traditional gendered expectations. The findings indicate that the historical construction of the nursing profession in Türkiye was shaped through the intersection of modernization goals and enduring societal gender norms.

Keywords: History of Nursing, Nurse’s Role, Newspapers as Topic, Qualitative Research

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu araştırma, 1929–1954 yılları arasında hemşirelik mesleğinin toplumsal söylemlerini ve temsillerini incelemek amacıyla yürütülmüştür.

Yöntem: Çalışma, 1929–1954 yılları arasında yayımlanan gazeteleri kapsayan Muteferriqa Dijital Gazete Arşivi verileri kullanılarak yürütülmüş nitel bir araştırmadır. Tarihsel doküman analizi ve eleştirel söylem analizi birlikte uygulanmış; 782 gazete sayısı taranmış ve dahil edilme ölçütlerini karşılayan 126 haber analiz edilmiştir. Kodlama süreci üç araştırmacı tarafından bağımsız biçimde yürütülmüş ve söylemsel örüntüler dört dönemsel tema altında bütünleştirilmiştir.

Bulgular: Hemşirelik mesleğinin temsilleri dört söylemsel küme etrafında şekillenmiştir. 1930’lu yıllarda hemşirelik, Cumhuriyet’in modernleşme projesiyle uyumlu bir “ahlaki hizmet” ve “medeniyet göstergesi” olarak sunulmuş; bakım emeği şefkat ve ulusal sorumluluk temalarıyla ilişkilendirilmiştir. 1939–1945 döneminde söylem belirgin biçimde militarize olmuş; hemşirelik “sağlık ordusu” ve “vatan hizmeti” gibi kavramlarla çerçevelenmiştir. 1946–1950 döneminde eğitim süresinin uzatılması ve müfredatın güçlendirilmesiyle profesyonelleşme öne çıkmıştır. 1950–1954 yıllarında ise hemşirelik Dünya Hemşireler Günü kutlamaları aracılığıyla artan kamusal görünürliğe ulaşmış; hem modern bir uzmanlık alanı hem de duygusal emek ve hizmet idealleriyle ilişkilendirilen bir mesleki rol olarak temsil edilmiştir.

Sonuç: Erken Cumhuriyet basınında hemşirelik, profesyonelleşme söylemi ile geleneksel kadınlık ideallerini bir arada taşıyan çok katmanlı bir yapıda sunulmuştur. Bulgular, hemşirelik mesleğinin tarihsel olarak modernleşme hedefleri ile toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının keşifinde inşa edildiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hemşirelik tarihi, Hemşirenin Rolü, Konu Olarak Gazeteler, Nitel Araştırma

The early Republican era was a critical turning point for both the institutionalization of the nursing profession and the redefinition of female identity (1,2). Although nursing advanced during this period through institutional steps toward professionalization, the profession's social position remains ideologically constructed around values attributed to womanhood. This dual structure, frequently emphasized in the literature, constitutes a fundamental area of tension that persists throughout the profession's historical development (3,4). According to Segev's (4) comprehensive historical analysis, this tension is not limited to the Republic's modernization policies; social transformations that began in the late Ottoman period facilitated women's entry into the health and care field and paved the way for the rapid professionalization of nursing in the Republican era.

This historical background shows that nursing took shape in multiple ways along the axes of women's labor, modernization, and professionalization, and that the social perception of the nursing profession was constructed not only through health policies but also through its representation in the press of the time. Especially from the 1930s onward, newspapers became an important medium that shaped the profession's public image by associating nursing with various social and ideological discourses aligned with the early Republic's modernization project. Therefore, examining representations of nursing in the early Republican press is important for understanding the profession's place in social memory, its relationship to the ideology of modernization, and the reconfiguration of female identity.

In recent years, research on media representations of nursing has grown in both national and international literature. In the Turkish context, Yaman et al. (5) have compared the portrayal of nursing before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that nursing discourses are reproduced with emotional and heroic themes during crisis periods such as pandemics. International studies also support similar trends: Bagnasco et al. (6) noted that during crises, nurses are often framed by "heroic" narratives; Hoyle et al. (7) noted that nursing is sometimes represented through discourses of crisis and inadequacy. Additionally, van Wijk et al. (8) found that nurses have very limited visibility in media discourse on politics and innovation.

All these studies show that representations of nursing in the media constitute an important discursive field that shapes the profession's social value, professional identity, and position within the healthcare system. However, very few studies in Türkiye have examined representations of nursing in the press during the early Republican period using a historical and discourse-based framework. This research aims to examine the social discourse and representations of the nursing profession in the Turkish press between 1929 and 1954 using the Muteferriqa digital newspaper archive. The originality of this study lies in three aspects. First, unlike previous studies that rely predominantly on secondary historical sources, the present study conducts a systematic discourse analysis directly on primary sources newspaper texts published during the period under investigation. Second, the study offers a comparative periodization by examining four distinct historical phases spanning a quarter century, thereby revealing how nursing discourse shifted across different political and social contexts. Third, by juxtaposing early Republican representations with contemporary media findings, the study traces discursive continuities and demonstrates that themes such as emotional labor, sacrifice, and gendered professionalism have persisted across nearly a century of nursing discourse in Türkiye.

Material and Methods

Research design

This qualitative study employed both historical document analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine representations of nursing in the Turkish press during the early Republican period. Document analysis focused on the systematic evaluation of newspaper texts within their historical context, whereas discourse analysis focused on interpreting linguistic patterns, ideological emphases, and social meanings. The methodological framework drew on Bowen's (9) document review approach and Wodak and Meyer's (10) critical discourse analysis studies; thus, the content and ideological dimensions of nursing discourse were addressed holistically.

Data source and scope of research

The data source for this study is the Muteferriqa Digital Newspaper Archive (11). The research covers nursing-related news items published in Turkish newspapers

printed in the Latin alphabet between 1929 and 1954. The year 1929 was chosen as the starting point following the alphabet reform, when the Latin alphabet became widespread in the press. The year 1954 marked the endpoint of the institutionalization of nursing in Türkiye. Ottoman Turkish newspapers were therefore excluded.

Data selection process

Newspaper scans were conducted using keywords such as “nurse,” “nursing,” “nursing school,” “nursing college,” “health officer,” “graduation,” and “practicum” (Table 1). The search strategy was exhaustive rather than sampled: all keyword combinations listed in Table 1 were systematically applied across the entire Muteferriqa archive for the period 1929–1954, and every issue returning a keyword match was retrieved for screening. This process yielded 782 newspaper issues from more than 20 distinct newspaper titles for initial review. The three researchers independently screened the retrieved issues, and their results were cross-checked to ensure no

relevant item was missed. Following screening, 126 news articles that directly addressed the nursing profession were included in the final analysis. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) the text explicitly discussed nursing as a profession, educational field, or health service role; (b) the text was published between 1929 and 1954 in a Latin-script Turkish newspaper; and (c) the text was legible and complete enough for analysis. The exclusion criteria were: (a) texts in which the word “nurse” appeared solely in a kinship or metaphorical sense unrelated to the health profession; (b) news items that mentioned nursing only tangentially without substantive content about the profession; (c) duplicate publications of the same text across different dates or newspapers; and (d) technically unreadable newspaper pages due to print damage or digitization artifacts. The distribution of included articles across years was not uniform; it reflected the actual volume of nursing-related press coverage in each period, with higher concentrations during the wartime years (1939–1945) when health workforce mobilization was a prominent public concern.

Table 1. Search indexes and newspaper names used in the research

Indexes	Newspaper Names
“Nursing” AND school	Cumhuriyet, Vakit, Kurun, İkdam, Son Telgraf
Nursing school	Cumhuriyet, Vakit, Kurun, Yeni Asır
“Nursing” AND school AND graduation	İkdam, Son Posta, Kurun
“Nursing school” AND (registration OR students OR admissions)	Vakit, Kurun, Akşam, Akşam Postası
Nursing education	Kurun, Vakit, Türk Sözü
Nurse AND (duration OR period OR time of study)	Cumhuriyet, Vakit, Yeni Asır
Health officer AND (school OR course)	Akşam, Son Telgraf, Tasvir-i Efkâr
Patient care school / patient care course	Vakit, Kurun, Yeni Sabah
“Patient attendant” AND (practical training OR practice)	Vakit, Akşam, Son Telgraf
“Nursing” AND (graduation OR diploma OR certificate)	Cumhuriyet, Kurun, Ulus
Nursing AND (course OR school OR class OR practical training)	Vakit; Kurun; İkdam

Data collection process

Data collection was conducted independently by three researchers. Each news item was systematically numbered, and the newspaper name, publication date, headline, and content were recorded. Researchers independently reviewed screening results, recorded inclusion/exclusion decisions with justifications, compared records, removed duplicates, and created a shared data pool.

Data analysis

Analysis combined historical document analysis and critical discourse analysis. Document analysis evaluated content characteristics regarding historical context, health policies, and professional organization. Critical discourse analysis was conducted following Wodak and Meyer's (10) framework and operated at three interconnected levels. At the textual level, the researchers examined specific word choices, metaphors, and rhetorical devices used to describe nursing and nurses (e.g., "health army," "compassionate hands," "self-sacrificing woman"), as well as sentence structures that positioned nursing within particular semantic fields. At the discursive practice level, the analysis focused on how nursing-related texts were produced and circulated in the press including the genres in which nursing appeared (news reports, recruitment advertisements, editorials, event coverage), the institutional voices represented (state agencies, Red Crescent, military authorities, educational institutions), and the intertextual connections between different news items across the study period. At the social practice level, the analysis situated these textual and discursive patterns within the broader sociopolitical context of early Republican Türkiye, examining how press representations of nursing intersected with state modernization policies, wartime mobilization strategies, gender ideologies, and professional institutionalization processes. To ensure analytical rigor, coding was carried out through a structured process. First, each of the three researchers independently coded all 126 news items, generating preliminary code lists based on recurring expressions, thematic emphases, and ideological orientations identified in the texts. Following this independent coding round, the three code lists were systematically compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence. Discrepancies in coding were then discussed in joint consensus meetings, during which each researcher

presented their rationale for specific codes. Through negotiated consensus, disagreements were resolved, overlapping codes were merged, and a final consolidated code list was established. Themes were derived from the agreed-upon codes and organized into four period-based discursive clusters. This negotiated consensus approach, in which independent coding is followed by structured comparison and joint resolution, served as the primary reliability strategy and is consistent with established qualitative research practices for ensuring intercoder consistency in interpretive studies (19).

Ethical aspects of the research

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. The research protocol was evaluated by the Acibadem University and Acibadem Healthcare Institutions Medical Research Ethics Committee; it was discussed at meeting number 2025/18 and found to be ethically acceptable from a medical ethics perspective, with decision number 2025--18/685. During the research process, all data were used solely for scientific purposes; no personal information was collected, and all analyses were conducted in accordance with ethical principles, confidentiality rules, and academic integrity. This manuscript was drafted and reported in accordance with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) guideline (18).

Results

Through document and critical discourse analyses, it was found that representations of nursing in the media varied at specific historical turning points. The data were divided into four period clusters based on dominant themes, conceptual frameworks, state policy references, and ideological emphasis (Table 2).

Table 2. Periodic themes of nursing discourse in newspaper reports 1929-1954 and sample quotations

Periodic Theme	Newspaper – Date	Title	Discourse Excerpt
1930s: Women's Labor in the First Decade of the Republic and New Professional Identity	Vakit – 27.08.1930	From the Directorate of the Red Crescent Nursing School	"Our school, which prepares a most honorable future and life for our young girls, has begun accepting students... This school aims to train ladies who will extend a hand of compassion to the children of the homeland."
	Yeni Asır – 30.04.1935	Annual Meeting of the Red Crescent Society	"The interest of our young girls in the nursing profession is a great gain for the country... The service of our women in the progress of the nation is immense."
	Kurun – 16.03.1935	An Hour at the Home Where Nurses Are Trained	"Each of the nurses trained at the nursing school is seen as a servant ready to work for the homeland."
	Cumhuriyet – 26.06.1936	A Nursing School Will Be Opened in Ankara	"A nursing school will be opened in Ankara... The teachers who will instruct at this school will be selected from graduates of higher teacher training schools and sent abroad for advanced study."
1939–1945: Statist Understanding of Health During the War Years and the Discourse of "Service to the Homeland"	Yeni Asır – 02.05.1940	The Enlightened Turkish Woman – A Call to Women as Wartime Nurses	"Turkish women are invited to serve as nurses under the command of the army on campaign... This duty is a sacred service to be carried out by women's hands in the defense of the homeland."
	Vatan – 27.05.1941	Activities of the Benevolent Society – More Than Three Thousand Young Girls Have Applied for Voluntary Nursing	"The nursing school administrative board members of the Benevolent Society gathered at the General Directorate of Physical Education; the courses that have been prepared will open shortly. The number of young girls who have applied for voluntary nursing exceeds three thousand"
	Vakit – 12.06.1941	From the Izmir Military Recruitment Office	"Our ladies serving in the medical corps show as much self-sacrifice as soldiers..."
1946–1950: Institutionalization, Professional Status, and the Construction of Modern Female Identity	Cumhuriyet – 25.08.1947	For Female Middle School Graduates – Tuberculosis Control Nursing School	"Those who demonstrate success in the nursing profession during their period of study... will serve the country's health services with competence."
	Cumhuriyet – 22.12.1947	Midwives, Nurses, and Patient Attendants Wanted	"There are vacancies in our Factory Health Protection organization for one midwife, one nurse, and four patient attendants. Those who have graduated from the Red Crescent Nursing School or the Medical Faculty Midwifery School will be accepted for midwifery and nursing positions; for patient attendant positions, those who have worked successfully in hospitals for at least three years will be accepted. Graduates with schooling in patient care will be preferred."
	Tan – 28.06.1948	Diplomas Were Presented to 20 Nurses Yesterday	"The young nurses have gained expertise in order to take up posts in the country's modern hospitals... Diplomas were conferred upon those who successfully completed their practical training and coursework."
1950s: The Socialization of Professional Identity and Public Visibility	Vatan – 08.04.1954	World Nurses' Day Was Celebrated	"Our nurses, who laid a wreath at the Republic Monument, once again demonstrated that they are the symbol of compassion and service of our nation."
	Vatan – 13.04.1954	Infinite Self-Sacrifice	"The saga of self-sacrifice of Florence Nightingale, the founder of the modern nursing profession... serves as an inspiration to the love of service in the hearts of Turkish nurses."
	Vatan – 02.06.1954	The Mother of Nightingale in the Service of Humanity	"This woman, the founder of modern nursing, had rushed to the aid of suffering humanity at the command she received from God."

1. The 1930s: Women's labor and new professional identity in the first decade of the Republic

In the early 1930s, nursing was represented as a moral and national service field enabling women's participation in public life, presented as part of modernization and a tool redefining women's social status. Frequently encountered terms included "nursing school," "nursing course," and "health officer school"; nursing was framed as "the first legitimate profession that allowed women to leave the home."

From 1935–1936, the discourse became even more pronounced in news reports about the Hilâl-i Ahmer Nursing School. Here, nursing is presented with expressions such as "a service that combines feminine grace with self-sacrifice," "ladies extending a compassionate hand to the children of the nation," and "pioneering Turkish girls of civilization" (Fig. 1). These expressions consistently linked women's labor with themes of emotion, self-sacrifice, and national duty.



Figure 1: Newspaper article about the Hilal-i Ahmer Nursing School in the 1930s (Vakit, 30 August 1930)

2. 1939–1945: The state-centered approach to healthcare and the rhetoric of "service to the nation" during the war years

During World War II, nursing representations became distinctly militarized within the discourse of "national service." Nursing was presented as a field in which women served as "soldiers of the health army" behind the front lines. Expressions such as "women's hands in the defense of the homeland," "nurses serving as soldiers," and "women serving in the nation's health army" were prominent in newspaper reports; thus, nursing was

associated with a discourse that redefined women's labor within a nationalist and military framework (Fig. 2). For instance, one newspaper quoted a young woman stating: "If tomorrow we must go to war in defense of the homeland, am I to spend my young days seeking refuge among healers?" (Cumhuriyet, 1939), framing nursing as a patriotic duty rather than a personal choice. Similarly, the press reported that "the number of young girls who applied for voluntary nursing exceeds three thousand" (Vatan, 1941), and that "our ladies serving in the medical corps show as much self-sacrifice as soldiers" (Vakit, 1941).



Figure 2: Newspaper article from the 1940s regarding nursing and national service discourse (Yeni Asır, 2 May 1940)

News and advertisements from these years reveal that nursing was no longer merely "compassionate work suited to women's nature" but a technical health service under state control. Headlines emphasized discipline, standardization, and official control under state-oriented health policies. In this period, the dominant framing shifted from the "compassionate woman entering the public sphere" to the "health soldier serving with military discipline," while references to qualities of compassion attributed to women continued to appear alongside the new militarized language.

3. 1946–1950: Institutionalization, professional status, and the construction of modern female identity

In the postwar period, nursing discourse shifted from the framework of "national service" and military discipline

toward institutionalization, raising educational standards, and equipping women with modern knowledge. Between 1946 and 1950, the transition from course-level to school-level training accelerated, the curriculum was strengthened with medical courses, and discussions about professional status gained visibility.

Terms such as “nursing education,” “practical training,” and “diploma” in newspaper articles indicate the profession’s increasing representation as a knowledge-based field. A recruitment announcement stated that “those who

demonstrate success in the nursing profession during their period of study... will serve the country’s health system” (Cumhuriyet, 1947), while a graduation report noted that “the young nurses have gained expertise in order to take up posts in the country’s modern hospitals” (Tan, 1948). Between 1947 and 1949, educational duration was extended, basic medical courses were added to the curriculum, and graduation ceremonies were covered in the press (Fig. 3), reflecting a shift in the representation of nursing from an emotionally defined service toward a knowledge- and science-based health field.



Figure 3: Newspaper articles on nursing education and graduation between 1946 and 1950 (Left: Cumhuriyet, 25 August 1947; Right: Tan, 28 June 1942)

Another noteworthy element is the strong association between women’s modernization and the nursing profession. Nursing was represented with phrases such as “the distinguished profession of the urban and educated Turkish woman” and “women with professions beneficial to the country,” linking the language of women’s modernization directly with nursing’s professional development.

By 1950, nursing was framed as a career path for women’s economic independence and integration into modern urban life. Nevertheless, expressions such as “compassionate hands” and “the mercy of a woman’s heart” showed that the emotional aspect persisted, though now harmonized with professional qualities rather than wartime sacrifice

4. The 1950s: The Socialization of Professional Identity and Public Visibility

The 1950s were a period when nursing became a visible, recognized profession with a distinct institutional identity in society. During this period, nursing increasingly came to the public stage in newspapers, emphasizing both the profession’s international nature and its social importance. In particular, news reports on International Nurses Day show that nurses participated en masse in celebrations, attended official ceremonies, and presented the profession as an integral part of modern Türkiye’s healthcare system. One report described how “our nurses, who laid a wreath at the Republic Monument, once again demonstrated that they are the symbol of compassion and service” (Vatan, 1954). Another article recounted that “this woman, the founder of modern nursing, had rushed

to the aid of suffering humanity” (Vatan, 1954), elevating Florence Nightingale as the idealized figure of the profession. The celebrations held in front of the Taksim

Republic Monument (Fig. 4) are important indicators symbolizing the increased public visibility of nurses and the framing of the profession as a national value.



Figure 4: 1950–1954: Newspaper Articles Related to the Emergence of the Nursing Profession in the Public Stage (Left: Vatan, 8 April 1954; Right: Vatan, 13 April 1954)

A notable aspect of nursing discourse during this period was the coconstruction of professionalism and ideals of emotional labor. The advertisement titled “Endless Sacrifice” (Fig. 4) presents nursing not merely as a profession but also as a “woman’s duty” defined by emotional qualities such as devotion, compassion, kindness, and dedication. The elevation of Florence Nightingale as an idealized founding figure within the historical narrative, the sanctification of women’s labor, and the identification of the profession with self-sacrifice recurred prominently in the texts of this period. Across these representations, nursing was presented as a modern profession alongside descriptions of women as “compassionate, self-sacrificing individuals with a natural inclination to serve.”

Discourse analysis reveals a two-way construction process in the form of representation during the 1950s. On the one hand, nursing is presented as a modern, institutional, and internationally recognized profession, opening up a new social status and visibility for women; on the other hand, the profession continues to be defined through emotional labor, framed by traditional ideals of womanhood such as “endless sacrifice,” “the compassion of a woman’s heart,” and “caring hands.” These two strands of discourse professionalization and emotional femininity

appeared simultaneously within the same texts, with neither fully replacing the other.

In summary, between 1950 and 1954, press representations of nursing in Türkiye combined portrayals of a modernized health profession with continued references to traditional ideals of womanhood. The emergence of International Nurses Day in public celebrations and the prevalence of publications framed around sacrifice illustrate this coexistence of professional and gendered representations.

Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that representations of nursing in the press during the early Republican period were closely tied to Türkiye’s modernization process, gender ideologies, and state health policies. This view points to a broad structural pattern that intersects with both the historical literature in Türkiye and international research. Two complementary theoretical perspectives help interpret these findings. First, the concept of gendered professionalism, as articulated in recent nursing scholarship (12,13), posits that nursing has been historically constructed at the intersection of

professional expertise and feminized care ideals, resulting in a persistent tension between scientific advancement and emotional labor expectations attributed to women. Second, from a Foucauldian perspective, press discourse functions as a mechanism of disciplinary power through which professional identities are not merely reflected but actively produced and regulated (17). In this view, newspaper representations of nursing do not simply mirror social reality; they constitute discursive practices that normalize particular subject positions such as the “self-sacrificing nurse” or the “health soldier” and thereby shape both public perception and professional self-understanding. Together, these perspectives offer a lens for understanding how the press simultaneously advanced nursing’s professionalization while reinforcing its subordination within gendered power structures.

First, the early press’s portrayal of nursing as both “the new female figure of modern Türkiye” and “a self-sacrificing, compassionate caregiver” reveals that the profession was historically constructed around a dual identity. From the perspective of gendered professionalism, this duality is not coincidental but structural: the very conditions that enabled nursing’s entry into the public sphere its alignment with feminized virtues of care and compassion simultaneously constrained its recognition as an autonomous scientific discipline (12,13). In the Turkish context, the findings of Dal and Kitiş (3), who evaluate early nursing discourse within the framework of women’s labor and emotional sacrifice, support the representations revealed in this study.

The findings of this study regarding the war years show that nursing was strongly linked to national mobilization and statist health policies. This situation largely coincides with Segev’s (4) historical analysis that nursing was positioned as a functional field in nation-building during the period from the late Ottoman Empire to the Republic. International research has shown that nurses are similarly represented as “heroes,” “servants of the nation,” or “sacrificial health workers” during times of war and crisis (6,14). From a Foucauldian standpoint, the wartime press operated as a disciplinary apparatus that repositioned nurses from civilian caregivers to “health soldiers,” thereby subjecting the profession to state-directed norms of obedience and national duty. This discursive shift illustrates how power operates not through overt coercion but through the normalization of particular professional identities in public discourse (17). From this perspective, early Republican media in Türkiye reflected

a global discursive trend by framing nursing in terms of military discipline, national duty, and sacrifice.

Representations in the postwar press, focusing on professionalization, raising educational standards, and strengthening professional status, parallel both Türkiye’s modernization projects and findings on the history of nursing in other countries. The evolution of nursing education in many Western countries from a hospital-centered structure to a science-based, institutionalized model since the mid-20th century has also been documented in the histories of countries such as Norway and Canada (15,16). This transformation shows that the themes of “medical knowledge,” “institutionalization,” and “professional expertise,” which were prominent in the Turkish press during the same period, intersect with international trends of professionalization.

During the 1950s, when the visibility of nursing in the public sphere increased significantly, rituals such as International Nurses Day were featured in newspapers, indicating that the profession’s status within the national health system strengthened. Although a modern professional identity emerged during this period, the discourse still contained traditional ideals of femininity such as emotional labor, compassion, and self-sacrifice, which corresponds to the structure discussed in the international literature as the “dual identity” problem (17,13). Therefore, while nursing has progressed toward professionalization, it has remained represented as a profession that upholds historical gender norms.

Furthermore, the comparison established with current media research also points to significant continuity. The portrayal of nurses as “heroes,” “self-sacrificing,” and “national duty bearers” during the COVID-19 pandemic (5) almost perfectly aligns with the discursive patterns identified in this study in the early Republican press. Accordingly, the themes of self-sacrifice and emotional labor historically reproduced in nursing discourse have moved beyond being merely a discourse of the past and continue to occupy a central place in health policies and media representation today.

In general, these findings show that the nursing profession in Türkiye is a multilayered field of representation shaped by historical conditions and by the intersection of modernization discourses, gender regimes, and national ideologies. The press emerges not merely as a passive recorder of professional developments but as an active

site of power where nursing identities were constructed, negotiated, and constrained. The continuity established between representations in the early Republican press and contemporary media discourses reveals that nursing has been reproduced within a rigid discursive framework centered on themes such as emotional labor, sacrifice, and national service—a framework that continues to shape and limit the profession’s social recognition and autonomy.

Conclusion

This study examined how the nursing profession was represented in the Turkish press during the early Republican period and identified the themes through which its social and ideological framework was constructed. The discourses in newspapers reveal that nursing was redefined at different points in line with modernization policies, national identity constructs, and gender norms. The analysis shows that although the profession progressed toward professionalization over time, its association with emotional labor, sacrifice, and qualities considered specific to women remained constant.

This historical analysis reveals that nursing has been shaped not only as a health profession but also as a social role imbued with ideological and cultural meanings. The analysis of the press’s discursive production reveals the social perceptions accompanying the profession’s institutional development and offers a comprehensive perspective on nursing’s historical positioning in Türkiye.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to Latin-script newspapers found in the Mutferrıqa digital archive and does not cover the entire press diversity of the period. The archive may contain gaps due to incomplete digitization, physical deterioration of original copies, or selective preservation, which means that some nursing-related publications may not have been captured. Second, the study examined only printed texts; oral narratives, institutional archives, or educational materials from the period were not evaluated. Third, newspapers published during the early Republican era operated under varying degrees of state influence and editorial oversight. Therefore, the representations identified in this study should be understood as reflecting the officially sanctioned or editorially filtered discourse

of the period rather than the full spectrum of public opinion about nursing. Fourth, the editorial policies and ideological orientations of individual newspapers were not systematically analyzed as a separate variable.

Declarations

Funding

Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethics approval

This study was approved by Acıbadem University and Acıbadem Healthcare Institutions Medical Research Ethics Committee (Decision number: 2025-18/685).

Availability of data and material

The data used in this study are available from the Mutferrıqa Digital Newspaper Archive (<https://mutferrıqa.com>).

Authors’ contributions:

ES: Conceptualization, design, supervision, data collection, analysis and interpretation, literature review, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. HYÇ: Conceptualization, design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, literature review, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. OA: Conceptualization, data collection, analysis and interpretation, literature review, writing – original draft. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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