

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

The Relationship Between Perception of Gender, Autonomy and Professional Attitude in Nursing Students

Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Algısı, Özerklik ve Mesleki Profesyonel Tutum Arasındaki İlişki

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study was conducted to determine the relationship between of nursing students' gender perceptions on their autonomy and professional attitudes.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study. This reserach was performed with 215 students studying in the nursing program of a university in eastern Turkey between 25 April and 25 May 2018. The data of the study were collected with Personal Information Form, the Inventory of Professional Attitude at Occupation (IPAO), the Perception of Gender Scale (PGS) and Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS).

Results: It was determined that a positive correlation was found between the PGS score and IPAO ($r = 0.229, p < 0.001$). A negative correlation was found between total score of the sociotropy, the disapproval anxiety and pleasing others subscales and the PGS score ($r = -0.159, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.189, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.162, p < 0.05$; respectively). Also a positive correlation was found between total score of autonomy, individual achievement, freedom and solitude subscales and PGS score ($r = 0.293, p < 0.001$; $r = 0.311, p < 0.001$; $r = 0.217, p < 0.001$; $r = 0.1158, p < 0.05$, respectively).

Conclusion: According to the results of the research, the gender attitudes of the nursing students are positive and their understanding of autonomy is moderate. In addition, students' professional attitudes are high. It is important that students' education is planned in a way that promotes autonomy and egalitarian understanding.

Keywords: Nursing student, gender, autonomy, professionalism

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu araştırma, hemşirelik öğrencilerinde cinsiyet algısı, özerklik ve mesleki profesyonel tutum arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek için yapıldı.

Yöntem: Kesitsel, tanımlayıcı bir çalışmadır. Bu çalışma, 25 Nisan-25 Mayıs 2018 tarihleri arasında Türkiye'nin doğusunda bir üniversitenin hemşirelik programında öğrenim gören 215 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Meslekte Profesyonel Tutum Envanteri (MPTE), Toplumsal Cinsiyet Algısı Ölçeği (TCAÖ) ve Sosyotropi-Özerklik Ölçeği (SÖÖ) ile toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: TCAÖ puanı ile MPTE arasında pozitif korelasyon olduğu belirlendi ($r = 0.229, p < 0.001$). Sosyotropi toplam puanı, onaylamama kaygısı ve başkalarını memnun etme alt ölçekleri ile TCAÖ puanı arasında negatif korelasyon bulundu (sırasıyla $r = -0.159, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.189, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.162, p < 0.05$). Ayrıca özerklik toplam puanı, bireysel başarı, özgürlük ve yalnızlık alt ölçekleri ile TCAÖ puanı arasında pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur ($r = 0,293, p < 0,001$; $r = 0,311, p < 0,001$; $r = 0,217, p < 0,001$; $r = 0,1158, p < 0,05$).

Sonuç: Araştırma sonuçlarına göre hemşirelik öğrencilerinin toplumsal cinsiyet tutumları olumlu ve özerklik anlayışları orta düzeydedir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin mesleki tutumları yüksektir. Öğrencilerin eğitiminin özerkliği ve eşitlikçi anlayışı geliştirecek şekilde planlanması önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hemşirelik öğrencisi, toplumsal cinsiyet, özerklik, mesleki profesyonellik

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Introduction

The concept of gender defines the socially determined roles and responsibilities of women and men in the society they live in. Therefore, concept of gender covers the values, expectancies, judgments and roles about how the society sees us, perceives us, thinks about us and expects how we behave, as women and men (Özpulat, 2017). Gender affects many aspects of an individual's life such as social life, education, family, and vocational choices. When the history of the nursing profession is examined, it can be observed that gender has great effect. Since the beginning of humanity, the care and feeding of children and the elderly has traditionally been seen as the duty of women. However, the nursing profession is a profession that women and men can perform equally, and the individual and professional autonomy of professional practitioners is important (Başaran and Köşgeroğlu, 2020; Tuna, 2019; Ak et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2017). Autonomy, which is a Greek word, is defined as the freedom to make binding decisions and to act independently in matters related to one's field of practice (Melo et al., 2016; Supametaporn, 2013). The aging of the world population, the changes in the needs of individuals, the increase in the burden of disease have increased both the need for health services and caused a change in the quantity and quality of health services provided. The nursing profession needs to adapt to these changes, constantly renew itself, and provide high quality and safe care. In this context, nurses are expected not only to do what they are told, but also to decide independently and take responsibility for their decisions, which can only be possible with individual and professional autonomy (Hara et al., 2020; Baykara and Şahinoğlu, 2014).

Professional autonomy is an essential and distinctive component of professionalism. The key element of autonomy is responsibility, while decision making and implementation is the responsibility of the professional. Professionalization of the nursing profession is important for professional development (Türk et al., 2021). Identity development related to professionalism in nursing is important in nursing education. In addition, since student nurses are professionals of the future, it is important to determine the current situation in professionalism, to plan education, to determine the factors affecting professional attitude and professional autonomy, and to reveal the effect of gender. For this reason, during the education of the students, training is

given in accordance with professional rules and standards and practice is carried out in the clinic. No study has been found in the literature that reveals the relationship between nursing students' perception of gender and their autonomy and professional attitudes. Therefore, this research was conducted to investigate the effect of nursing students' gender perception levels on their autonomy and professional attitudes.

Method

Study Design

This cross-sectional study was conducted to determine effect of the gender perception levels of the nursing students on their autonomy and professional attitudes. This study performed at the nursing program of a university in eastern Turkey between 25th of April-25th of May 2018. The inclusion criteria were nursing students in their third and fourth year, and having clinical experience with patients. The sample population consisted of nursing students of the Faculty of Health Sciences in a University. The number of students continuing their education in the 2017-2018 academic year spring term was 325. All of the students were invited to participate in the study without sampling. However, a total of 110 students were excluded from the study because of absenteeism or unwillingness to participate in the study. The 1st and 2nd-years nursing students were not included in the study owing to their lack of clinical experience and provision of care to patients. The study was completed with 215 nursing student. The total response rate of the participants was 66.15% of 325.

Data Collection

The researcher explained the research purpose to the nursing students and then distributed the questionnaires to those who consented to participate. The data of this research were collected using the Personal Information Form (9 questions), Inventory of Professional Attitude at Occupation, The Perception of Gender Inventory and Sociotropy-Autonomy Inventory.

Data Collection Tools

Personal information form: This form, including sociodemographic questions, there were questions about the gender, age, class, the high school, marital status, the place of residence, the order of preference of the nursing department, and the family characteristics (the number of siblings, the employment status of the parents).

The Inventory of Professional Attitude at Occupation: The Inventory of Professional Attitude

at Occupation (IPAO) was developed by Erbil and Bakır (Erbil and Bakır, 2009). It is a one-dimensional assessment tool including the attitudes on matters like this professional education and development, interpersonal relations, approaching problems. It takes averagely 8-10 minutes to apply the inventory. Each item in this Likert-type inventory is scored from 5 to 1. In each item, 5 points are given to "strongly agree", 4 points are given to "partly agree", 3 points are given to "neutral", 2 points are given "disagree", and 1 point is given "strongly disagree". While the minimum score of IPAO is 32, its maximum score is 160. Complete point this inventory gives the score of professional attitude at occupation. It is evaluated that higher score of the inventory signifies the increasing of professionalism level. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability exponent of the inventory is 0.89 (Erbil and Bakır, 2009).

Also in this study, the reliability analysis of IPAO was performed. The Cronbach's Alpha value of IPAO was found as 0.93 in this study. This value showed that IPAO was valid and reliable in the study group.

The Perception of Gender Scale: The Perception of Gender Inventory (PGS) was developed in order to measure the gender perceptions of adults and it is composed of 25 items. The Turkish credibility and currency of the scale was done by Altınova and Duyan in 2013 (Altınova and Duyan, 2013). 10 of the items of the Perception of Gender Scale are positive and 15 of them are negative. In this 5-point Likert type scale, the participants are asked to express their opinions at five levels: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Accordingly, the scores to be obtained from the scale are in the range of 25-125 points and high scores signify that gender perception is positive. The scale consists of one dimension and its Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient is 0.87 (Altınova and Duyan, 2013; Altınova and Altuntaş, 2015).

Also in this research, the credibility analysis of PGS was performed. The Cronbach's Alpha value of PGS was 0.91. This value showed that PGS was valid and reliable in the study group.

The Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale: The sociotropy-autonomy Inventory (SAS), developed by Beck et al., in 1983, adapted to Turkish by Şahin et al., is a scale with sixty items, that measure the sociotropic and autonomous personality traits (Beck et al., 1983; Şahin et al., 1993) Thirty items belong to the sociotropy subscale and thirty items belong to

the autonomy subscale. According the results of the factor analysis of the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale, three factors are found for both dimensions. In the sociotropy subscale; the factors of disapproval anxiety, separation anxiety, and pleasing others are determined. In the autonomy subscale; individual achievement, freedom, and solitude factors are found. Each item is in 5-point Likert type with the response options from "it certainly does not define me (0 points)" to "it exactly defines me (4 points)", in response to the question "How does it define you?". The questions of the sociotropy and autonomy subscales are placed in a mixed order and the maximum score of a subscale is 120. While high scores obtained from the sociotropy subscale indicate high sociotropic personality traits, high scores obtained from the autonomy subscale indicate high autonomous personality traits. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.81 (Şahin et al., 1993).

Also in this research, the credibility analysis of SAS was performed. The Cronbach's Alpha value of SAS was 0.83. This value showed that SAS was valid and reliable in the study group.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program, version 16.0. For the descriptive information; number, percent, mean and standard deviation among the descriptive statistics were used. In order to examine whether or not the data was normally distributed, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test among the normality tests was used. The Pearson's correlation analysis was used in order to examine the correlation of PGI with IPAO and SAS of the nursing students.

Results

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the students, who participated in the study. The age average of the students participating in the study was 22.0 ± 1.55 . It was determined that 64.7% of the students were female, 95.8% were single, 83.3% lived in a city, the mothers of 95.3% were unemployed, and 75.8% had at least three siblings. It was also determined that nursing department was the 1st choice of 64.2% of the nursing students in the university exam.

Table 2 lists the mean scores obtained by the participants in PGS, IPAO, and SAS. The mean scores obtained from PGS were 87.02 ± 17.9 and the mean scores of IPAO were 126.8 ± 18.9 The sociotropy dimension of SAS; the score of disapproval anxiety subscale was 19.6 ± 6.3 , the

score of the separation anxiety subscale was 31.9 ± 6.8 , and the score of pleasing others subscale was 13.8 ± 4.4 . The mean score obtained from individual achievement subscale of the autonomy dimension was 33.7 ± 6.2 , the mean score of the freedom subscale was 32.2 ± 5.7 , and the mean score of the solitude subscale was 15.2 ± 3.9 .

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the students (n = 215)

Socio-demographic Characteristics		
	Mean \pm SD	
Age (Mean \pm SD)	22.0 \pm 1.55	
	Number (n)	%
Gender		
Female	139	64.7
Male	76	35.3
Marital status		
Married	9	4.2
Single	206	95.8
Year in school		
3 rd Year	117	54.4
4 th Year	98	45.6
Place of residence		
City	179	83.3
Town / village	36	16.7
Mother's Employment Status		
Employed	10	4.7
Unemployed	205	95.3
Father's Employment Status		
Employed	155	72.1
Unemployed	60	27.9
Number of Siblings		
1	18	8.3
2	34	15.8
3 and more	163	75.8
Order of preferring*		
1 st rank	138	64.2
2 nd -10 th rank	68	31.6
11 th rank and over	9	4.2

* Preferring the nursing department after university exam;
SD: Standard deviation

A positive correlation was found between the PGS score and IPAO ($r = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$) (Table 3). A negative correlation was found between total score of the sociotropy, the disapproval anxiety and pleasing others subscales and the PGS score ($r = -0.159$, $p < 0.05$; $r = -0.189$, $p < 0.05$; $r = -0.162$, $p < 0.05$; respectively). A positive correlation was found between total score of autonomy, individual achievement, freedom and solitude subscales and PGS score ($r = 0.293$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$;

$r = 0.217$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.1158$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Also, a positive correlation was determined between IPAO total score and autonomy total score, individual achievement, freedom and solitude subscales ($r = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.376$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.158$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). A positive correlation was found between SAS total score and PGS and IPAO scores ($r = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$, respectively) (Table 3).

Table 2. Descriptive properties of PGS, IPAO, and SAS scales (n: 215)

Scale items	Possible range of values	Participant values	
		Mean \pm SD	Range
PGS	25-125	87.02 \pm 17.9	29-125
IPAO	32-160	126.8 \pm 18.9	70-160
SAS Total	0-240	135.7 \pm 18.6	93-208
Sociotropy Total	0-120	65.4 \pm 14.6	18-104
Disapproval anxiety	0-40	19.6 \pm 6.3	1-35
Separation anxiety	0-52	31.9 \pm 6.8	7-48
Pleasing others	0-28	13.8 \pm 4.4	2-26
Autonomy Total	0-120	81.2 \pm 12.9	29-114
Individual achievement	0-48	33.7 \pm 6.2	11-48
Freedom	0-48	32.2 \pm 5.7	13-48
Solitude	0-24	15.2 \pm 3.9	5-24

PGS: Perceived of Gender Scale; IPAO: Inventory of Professional Attitude at Occupation; SAS: Sociotropy Autonomy Scale, SD: Standard deviation

Discussion

This study was conducted to determine the gender perceptions of the nursing students, and to examine its correlation with professionalism and sociotropic-autonomous personality traits. The culture in which the individual lives determines the social role distribution of women and men. This distribution of social role manifests itself in the nursing profession where there is more female dominance (Kahraman et al., 2018). But nursing is a profession that can be practiced by both men and women without gender discrimination (Başar and Demirci, 2018). In this research, it was determined that gender perception of nursing students was positive. Similar to the present study, in the study conducted by Yıkar et al., in Turkey, it was stated that the nursing students had an equalitarian attitude regarding the gender roles (Yıkar et al., 2020). The

results of the present study were found to be compatible with the literature. Today, nurses are expected not only to provide care, but also to do research, develop theories, and take part in professional activities. The fulfillment of all these activities can only be achieved with professional nursing education. Increasing the quality of care can only be possible with the efficient and motivated work of professional members. It was found that the

professional attitudes of the nursing students were high in the present study. This result can be accepted as an indication that students have started to internalize knowledge, skills, attitudes and values related to nursing. Similar to this study, in the study conducted by Ak et al., the nursing department students were found to have a high level of professional attitude (Ak et al., 2018).

Table 3. The correlation between gender perception levels, autonomy, and professionalism levels of nursing students (n = 215)

Variables	Variables									
	PGS	IPAO	SAS: Sociotropy-Disapproval anxiety	SAS: Sociotropy-Separation anxiety	SAS: Sociotropy-Pleasing others	SAS:Sociotropy-Total	SAS:Autonomy Individual achievement	SAS: Autonomy Freedom	SAS:Autonomy Solitude	SAS: Autonomy Total
PGS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IPAO	.229*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAS:Sociotropy-disapproval anxiety	-.189*	-.130	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAS:Sociotropy-separation anxiety	-.062	.089	.571*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAS:Sociotropy-pleasing others	-.162*	-.071	.615*	.422*	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAS:Sociotropy-Total	-.159*	-.036	.882*	.839*	.762*	-	-	-	-	-
SAS:Autonomy Individual achievement	.311*	.376*	-.130	.098	-.079	-.034	-	-	-	-
SAS:Autonomy freedom	.217*	.310*	.149*	.310*	.061	.227*	.627*	-	-	-
SAS:Autonomy Solitude	.158*	.158*	.050	.009	.116	.060	.313*	.422*	-	-
SAS:Autonomy-Total	.293*	.364*	.019	.186*	.024	.102	.867*	.868*	.668*	-
SAS-Total	.330*	.283*	-.683*	-.532*	-.585*	-.718*	.634*	.428*	.419*	.619*

PGS: Perceived of Gender Scale; IPAO: Inventory of Professional Attitude at Occupation *Pearson's correlation: p <0.05 (two-tailed test)

One of the most important elements in the professionalization of nursing is autonomy. Four elements have been identified for professional autonomy in nursing: (1) providing care, (2) decision making, (3) collaboration with members of the healthcare team and colleagues, and (4) advocating for the rights of individuals served. The lack of full professional autonomy in nursing is the

most important obstacle to professionalization and reaching professional status (Supametaporn, 2013). In the present study, we found that sociotropy-autonomy individual traits of nursing students were at moderate level and their autonomous personality traits were higher than their sociotropic personality traits. In the study conducted by Uyar et al., they found the autonomy level of nursing students to be

slightly above the medium level. Likewise, Tarhan et al., in their study, found that the autonomy level of nursing students was moderately high. The results of the research show similarities with each other (Uyar and Güven, 2020; Tarhan, 2018).

There is a strong relationship between education and autonomy and as the level and quality of education increases, the level of autonomy also increases. It should be focused on developing and increasing the autonomy of student nurses in their vocational education processes (Türk et al., 2021). The development of the autonomy of a profession is very important in terms of enabling that profession to fulfill its specific role autonomously. The prominent role in the nursing profession is nursing care. Nursing care requires problem solving and decision making to determine the care needs of the individual, to plan and implement nursing interventions, and to evaluate the results. This can only be possible with the provision of professional autonomy. In the present study, it was found that there was a low positive correlation between the gender perceptions and sociotropy-autonomy mean scores of the nursing students, and their professional attitudes. It was found that there was a negative correlation between gender perception levels and sociotropic personality traits. The weak correlation between gender perceptions, sociotropy-autonomy and scales of professional attitude at occupation may be explained by the fact that the present study was conducted with the student nurses. This situation may be regarded among the limitations of this research. Together with going out to work, displaying acquirements acquired in the education period may vary. The professional identity development process is expected to mature as the acquirements turn into behavior in working life. One of the strengths of the present study is the lack of a study which evaluates three scales together among nursing or nursing students in the literature.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was found that there was a positive correlation between IPAO mean score and professionalism and autonomy personality traits of the nursing students and a negative correlation between IPAO mean score and sociotropic personality traits.

Reducing sexist behaviors that will negatively affect autonomy and professionalism will increase equalitarian attitude regarding the gender role. Therefore, it is necessary to be sensitive about gender role during both theoretical and practical education. Taking these measures will be effective

in reducing the gender inequalities and the related health inequalities. In addition, a strategy may be developed to prevent the negative effect of gender perception by organizing awareness training programs for developing sociotropy and autonomy personality traits together in nursing students.

Limitation of study

The strength of this research is to determine the effect of nursing students' perceptions of gender on autonomy and professional attitudes. However, this research also has limitation. The limitation of this research is that it includes little sample group. Future studies should be done with a larger sample group.

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Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by Non-Invasive Clinical Trials Ethics Committee of a University (No:17.05.2018/03). In addition, the institutional permission from the university, where this research was conducted, and written informed consent from the individuals who agreed to participate in this research were received.

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What did the study add to the literature?

- Reducing sexist behaviors that will negatively affect autonomy and professionalism will increase equalitarian attitude regarding the gender role.
 - A professional nurse as a member of the profession, who protects ethic values of nursing, has high autonomy and follows scientific developments, also helps to improve the quality of patient care.
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