



THE THOUGHTS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WHO WERE ELIGIBLE TO ENTER HEALTH DEPARTMENTS ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE STAGE OF DEPARTMENT PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research was planned as quantitative research to examine the thoughts of the students who are future healthcare team candidates on choosing health departments in their university preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method: The universe of the research consisted of first-year students who were eligible to enter the nursing and midwifery departments of a health school. All of the students in the universe agreed to participate in the research and formed the sample of the research. A questionnaire consisting of 22 questions developed by the researcher was applied to the participants online. Descriptive statistical methods were used in the evaluation of the research data.

Results: 66.2% (n=141) of the students stated that they voluntarily chose their departments without having second thoughts about it, 89.2% (n=190) stated that they loved their department; 33.8% (n=72) stated that they chose their department due to obligations, 92.5% (n=197) stated that working in the health field was not easy and 71.8% (n=153) stated that they found it risky to be a health worker in the future.

Conclusion: When students were asked about their thoughts on choosing a health field during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that although the majority of the students think that being a healthcare professional during the COVID-19 pandemic isn't easy and they find it risky in the future, they didn't experience any anxiety while choosing health departments and that they chose it willingly and voluntarily. It was determined that students who were worried about the pandemic were mostly afraid of infecting their relatives.

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a virus that spread worldwide in a short time after emerging in Wuhan, China, and causing severe pneumonia (1, 2). The COVID-19 disease emerged at the end of 2019 and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation as of March 11, 2020, as it was seen in 118 thousand people in 114 countries and caused the death of 4 thousand 291 people (3).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) which rapidly spread around has seriously affected health systems in all countries. Although it varies from country to country, approximately 5% of the individuals who caught COVID-19 developed into serious/critical cases and need to be treated in hospitals (4).

For this reason, all healthcare professionals have

undertaken important responsibilities in the management of this crisis, which creates a great burden for hospitals in Turkey as is the case for other countries (5, 6, 7). The importance of healthcare workers has been understood once again in the pandemic process, and there is a great need for healthcare workers in our country, as is the case for other countries (8). At this point, the thoughts of the students who will create the future of health professions when choosing their professions at the time of such a great pandemic are of great importance. For this reason, this study is thought to be an important resource for students to choose health fields in the following periods.

While intensive studies are carried out to investigate the pathophysiology, clinical outcomes, and treatment

of COVID-19, this research was planned as quantitative research to examine the thoughts of the students, who are future healthcare professional candidates, on the COVID-19 pandemic in the stage of choosing health departments in their university preferences.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study was planned as quantitative research in which data was collected using a form at a health school.

Study Sample and Data Collection

The study sample consisted of first-year students (n=213) who were eligible to enter the nursing (n=172) and midwifery (n=41) departments of a health school in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. All the students in the sample accepted to participate in the research and formed the sample of the research.

Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire form was created by the researchers in line with the relevant literature (1, 2, 7, 8). The questionnaire form consisted of 22 questions that determined the personal characteristics of students, their department preferences, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their department preferences.

The survey questions were uploaded in a Google Form file and the data were collected. Students' consent was obtained before applying the questionnaire.

Evaluation of the Data

The data were evaluated in the computer environment in the SPSS package program. In the evaluation of the research data, number, percentage, mean and standard deviation from descriptive statistical methods were used.

Ethical Dimension of the Study

Before starting the study, written permission was obtained from Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee (dated 06.01.2021, numbered GO 2021/29) and from the institution where the study was conducted. Consent was received from the students who were included in the study.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 19.35 ± 1.74 ; 95.3% (n=203) of them were between the ages of 18-21 and 74.2% (n=158) were female, 25.8% (n=55) were male. 46.9% (n=100) of the students lived in a district, 39.9% (n=85) lived in a city center and 13.1% (n=28) lived in a village or town; 56.3% (n=120) had an income status equal to expense status, 27.2% (n=58) had an income status less than expense status and 16.4% (n=35) had an income status higher than expense status. 49.8% (n=106) of the students passed the university exam the first time they had taken it, 35.7% (n=76) passed it the second time, 14.6% (n=31) passed the exam after taking it three or more times. In the university preference lists, 50.7% (n=108) of the students included the health department they chose in the first ten choices, the department 22.5% (n=48) of the students placed in was their first choice. In addition, the program the students are studying is the first undergraduate education that 97.7% (n=208) of the students received. 9.9% (n=21) of the students had previously graduated from a health vocational school, but none of them had worked at a health institution.

66.2% (n=141) of the students stated that they chose their department voluntarily and 89.2% (n=190) stated that they loved their departments. It was observed that 68.1% (n=49) of the 72 students who did not choose their department voluntarily due to various obligations, still loved their department. 92.5% (n=197) of the students stated that working in health care was not easy and 71.8% (n=153) stated that they found it risky to be a health worker in the future.

The answers of the students to the questions about being a health worker during the COVID-19 process and their department preferences are given in Table 1. When 38 students who preferred to study in a health department during the COVID-19 and expressed that they had concerns about it, they stated that they were afraid of catching the disease, carrying the virus to their homes, infecting their families and loved ones, being away from their families and loved ones for a long time, that the risks of catching the disease will increase in case of face-to-face education in the

Table 1: Students' Opinions on Healthcare Preferences During the COVID-19 Process

		n	%
Is it likely to encounter pandemics such as COVID-19 in every period?	Yes	203	95.3
	No	10	4.7
Have you had any concerns while choosing to study in a health department	Yes	38	17.8
	No	175	82.2
Do you think that being a healthcare worker during the COVID-19 pandemic is life-threatening?	Yes	179	84
	No	34	16
Has the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected your choice of a health department?	Yes	33	15.5
	No	180	84.5
Have you ever thought about the difficult working conditions which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic process before choosing your department?	Yes	108	50.7
	No	105	49.3
If you had another alternative outside of the health field during the COVID-19 pandemic, would you still prefer to be a healthcare professional?	Yes	150	70.4
	No	63	29.6
If you were to think that you will work in a pandemic hospital in the future, are you still satisfied with your current choice of the department?	Yes	177	83.1
	No	36	16.9
TOTAL		213	100.0

current process, that health workers are in a risky group in every aspect, that health workers are exposed to violence, that their position is a life-threatening one, that they had concerns about working overtime due to the low number of employees.

When the students who participated in the research were asked about their thoughts on the process of choosing a health department during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the students said that they gave importance to human life and chose their department voluntarily without having second thoughts, the department they had chosen was the department of their dreams and they preferred the health department fondly, they wanted to help people, be beneficial to and serve the society, take responsibility and protect people, the department they had chosen was suitable for them and that they were proud of their department; the other part of the students stated that they had chosen their department due to obligations, that their exam scores were fit for choosing these departments and that they have a higher chance of finding a job in the future due to the higher number of appointments in health departments, they had chosen a dangerous, risky and, difficult department, that they were nervous, afraid, especially that they were afraid of catching a disease during their internship.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Healthcare workers are the most vulnerable people at

the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic. The most important negative factors for the healthcare workers are; a severe working environment in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, limitation of freedom, heavy responsibilities, risk of death that can occur any time. For this reason, healthcare workers are faced with physical, mental and environmental stimuli and as a result, they experience health anxiety (9).

Health anxiety is the fear that an individual catch a disease (9). Thus, healthcare workers experience high health anxiety due to heavy workload and insomnia during the pandemic (10) and these situations may create negative thoughts towards healthcare professions in students who will be healthcare workers in the future.

However, when the thoughts of the students in this study on being a healthcare worker during the COVID-19 pandemic process and their department preferences were examined, it was observed that 95.3% of the students thought they could encounter pandemics such as COVID-19 in every period; while 82.2% of the students had no concerns while preferring to study in a health department during the COVID-19 pandemic, 84% of the students thought being a healthcare worker during the COVID-19 pandemic is life-threatening, 84.5% of the students thought the COVID-19 pandemic did not negatively affect their preference of a health department; 50.7% of the students thought about the increasingly difficult working conditions in the health field during the

COVID-19 pandemic before choosing a department, however, 49.3% did not think about it at all; 70.4% of the students would still chose to become a healthcare member during the COVID-19 pandemic process if they had another alternative outside of the health field; although there was a possibility that they might be employed at a pandemic hospital, 83.1% were happy to have chosen a health department.

A study by Huang et al. (2020) which examined the emotional reactions and coping strategies of nurses and nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic found that approximately 24.9% of the students experienced anxiety due to the pandemic (11). It was determined that 89.2% of the nursery and midwifery students who participated in this study chose their departments willingly, however, 92.5% thought that it was not easy to work in the healthcare field and 71.8% thought it was risky to be a healthcare worker; 17.8% of the students experienced anxiety while choosing nursery or midwifery departments. When these students were asked about their concerns, they stated that they were afraid of catching the disease, infecting their families and their loved ones, being separated from their families and loved ones for a long time and that the risks of catching the disease will increase in the current process, in case of face-to-face education. Similarly, in the study of Yorguner et al. (2021), in which the psychosocial difficulties university students faced in the COVID-19 pandemic and the students' knowledge, attitude and behavior towards the disease were examined, it was found that the anxiety levels of the students about the possible infection/or serious illness of an acquaintance were significantly higher than the anxiety of getting infected themselves (12). Looking at the findings of both studies, it can be said that students' concerns about COVID-19 are more related to the health and well-being of their loved ones than their health.

When the students who participated in the research were asked about their thoughts on the process of choosing a health department during the COVID-19 pandemic period, some of the students stated that they cared about human life and they chose their

departments without having second thoughts; some of the students stated that they chose their departments due to some obligations and that they were anxious and afraid because they found being a healthcare worker dangerous, risky and difficult.

Negative emotions such as anxiety, and fear experienced during the pandemic process may cause students to move away from the profession. By taking the necessary precautions in this process, especially students studying in health departments should be supported (13, 14).

As a result, it was observed that although most of the students who participated in the research thought that being a healthcare professional during the COVID-19 pandemic was not easy and that they found it risky to work as a healthcare professional in the future, they did not experience any anxiety, concern or fear, chose their department lovingly and willingly. It was determined that students who had concerns due to the pandemic were mostly afraid of infecting their relatives. However, it is not possible to generalize the results to all university students who are eligible to enter health departments because all participants were students of nursery or midwifery departments of the same school. Therefore it can be suggested that work with students who are eligible to enter health departments in all universities should be done more comprehensively.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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