

PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE NURSES ABOUT MALE NURSES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

KADIN HEMŞİRELERİN ERKEK HEMŞİRELERLE İLGİLİ ALGILARI:  
KALİTATİF BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Meltem AKBAS<sup>1</sup>, Ipek KOSE TOSUNOZ<sup>2</sup>, Gursel OZTUNC<sup>3</sup>

Özet

Araştırma, kadın hemşirelerin erkek hemşireleri algılama durumlarının belirlenmesi amacı ile yapılmıştır. Araştırma, niteliksel bir araştırma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini bir üniversite hastanesinde çalışan 12 kadın hemşire oluşturmuştur. Veriler, yüz yüze görüşme tekniğinin kullanıldığı yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine bireysel görüşme ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların tamamının, erkeklerin hemşirelik mesleğini yapmalarına olumlu baktıkları belirlenmiştir. Katılımcıların erkeklerin hemşirelik mesleğini yapmalarına olumlu bakma nedenleri mesleğe getiriler, fiziksel özellikler ve toplumsal cinsiyet temaları altında gruplanmıştır. Katılımcıların tamamı, erkek hemşirelerin hemşirelik mesleğine olumlu yönde katkıda bulduklarını belirtmiş ve bu katkıları bilimsel ve bireysel alt temaları olarak belirlenmiştir. Katılımcıların erkeklerin hemşire olmalarının toplum üzerinde ve toplumsal cinsiyet açısından olumlu ve olumsuz etkileri olduğunu düşündükleri belirlenmiştir. Kadın hemşirelerin erkek hemşirelerle ilgili olumlu algıları olduğu ve erkek hemşirelerin mesleğe olumlu katkı sağlayabileceklerini düşündükleri bulunmuştur. Hemşirelik okullarında kadın ve erkeklerin hemşire olarak eğitilmesine devam edilmesi önerilir. Bu şekilde, hemşirelik mesleği mensuplarının işbirliği yapmasına, iyi iletişim kurmasına, farklı cinsiyetlerden meslek mensuplarıyla çalışmasına ve hasta haklarının ideal bir seviyeye yükseltmesine yardımcı olmak mümkün olabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erkek, Kadın, Hemşire, Algı.

Abstract

This study aims to identify the perceptions of female nurses concerning male nurses. This study utilized a qualitative design. The participants were 12 female nurses who worked at a university hospital. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face. Data were analyzed using content analysis methods. All the participants were found to have positive perceptions concerning male nurses' performing the nursing profession. The reasons for their positive perceptions were grouped under the "advantages for the profession", "physical characteristics", and "gender" themes. All the participants thought that male nurses made positive contributions to the profession, which were identified as the "scientific" and "individual" sub-themes. Male nurses were found to have positive and negative effects on society and social gender roles. It was found that female nurses had positive perceptions concerning male nurses and thought that male nurses could make positive contributions to the profession. It is recommended to continue to educate females and males as nurses in nursing schools. This way, it could be possible to help nursing profession members to collaborate, establish good communication, work with members of the profession from different genders, and increase patient rights to an ideal level

**Keywords:** Female, Male, Nurse, Perception.

Geliş Tarihi (Received Date):28.02.2022, Kabul Tarihi (Accepted Date):24.03.2022, Basım Tarihi (Published Date): 31.05.2022 <sup>1</sup>Cukurova University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Midwifery, Adana, Turkey, <sup>2</sup>Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, Hatay, Turkey, <sup>3</sup>Professor Dr, University of Kyrenia, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, Kyrenia, Cyprus. **E-mail:** makbaskanat@gmail.com, **ORCID ID's:** M.A; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5845-0552>, I.K.T.; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2055-6260>, G.O.; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1972-1257>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

International Council of Nurses (ICN) is defined as “Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. It includes the promotion of health, the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people” (ICN). The nursing profession emerged from the desire to improve people’s health and provide care to sick people and maintained its presence as a community service for a long time. While social dynamics, health care needs, and health policies have changed, nursing has also changed by becoming a modern profession (Akbas, Kadioglu & Tuncer, 2017, pp. 104-112).

Nursing is one of the most female-dominated professions all over the world (Finnegan, 2019). Male nurses’ involvement in the nursing profession began due to social and political factors as well as changes in the concepts of femininity and masculinity. Men are known to have played important roles in the history of nursing and provided care to the sick and wounded (Evans, 2004, pp.321-328). Male nurses' presence in the nursing profession has increased since the 1970s around the world and since 2007 in Turkey (Finnegan, 2019; Nursing Law, 1954). For years, the nursing profession in Turkey was performed only by women due to legal obligations. With the changes made to the laws concerning nursing taking effect in 2007, males also gained the right to perform the nursing profession legally (Nursing Law, 1954).

The current international literature on this topic includes studies on the perceptions of male nurses about the profession (Shah, Parpio, Zeb, & Aurang, 2017, pp.1-3), male and female nurses’ perceptions about male nurses (Abdelrahman & Abdelkader, 2016, pp.46-55), and male nursing and its historical process (Arif & Khokhar, 2017, pp.889-1894; Evans, 2004, pp.321-328; Stanley et al., 2016, pp.1-6). In Turkey, there were studies conducted with student nurses (Kahraman, Tuncdemir & Özcan, 2015, pp.108-144), university students from various professions (Arslan & Agacdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166), and various segments of society (Bascı & Yilmazel, 2016, pp.68-74).

What are the perceptions of female nurses about the presence of male nurses in the nursing profession in Turkey? The way female nurses, who were the only group that was allowed to work as nurses in Turkey until the year 2007, perceive the participation of male nurses to the profession is important in terms of the improvement of the profession as well as the service quality of nurses. Determining female nurses' perception of male nurses and organizing formal and in-service trainings in line with the data obtained will increase the quality of nursing care. No qualitative studies were found to have investigated female nurses’ perceptions concerning male nurses in Turkey.

### 1.2. Objective

This study aims to identify the perceptions of female nurses concerning male nurses.



### **1.3. Research questions**

- What are the perceptions of female nurses about males' becoming nurses?
- What are the perceptions of female nurses about social gender in relation to the nursing profession?
- What are the perceptions of female nurses about the contribution of male nurses to the nursing profession?
- What are the perceptions of female nurses about the effects of male nurses' performing the nursing profession on society?

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Study design**

This study utilized a qualitative design. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face.

### **2.2. Study group**

The study group is composed of female nurses who worked at the university hospital. Maximum variation sampling, one of the non-probabilistic sampling methods, was used to determine the study group. With these sampling methods, nurses working in clinics with different characteristics were included in the sample. The participants were composed of 12 female nurses (3 worked in intensive care units, 3 in emergency units, 3 in internal disease clinics, and 3 in surgery clinics) who worked at a university hospital. These nurses accepted to participate in the study, had at least an undergraduate degree, had worked in adult clinics before, and previously worked with or currently work with male nurses. As the data obtained from interviews began to repeat, the number of the sample was identified as 12 nurses.

The average age of the participants was  $34.74 \pm 7.66$ . The majority of the participants were found to have lived most of their life in a big city and in the Mediterranean region. Of all the participants, 7 were married, 6 had a good income, and 2 had male nurses among their relatives.

All of the participants reportedly showed a willingness to work with male nurses; 5 of them had previously received care from a male nurse personally and were satisfied; or their relatives had received care from a male nurse and they were satisfied with the care they received.

### **2.3. Data collection tool**

Data were collected through the semi-structured interview form, which included 10 closed-ended and 4 open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions aimed to identify the participants' characteristics (place and region where they spent most of their lives, the clinics



where they worked, willingness and desire to work with a male nurse, and whether or not their relatives or themselves had personally received care from a male nurse). The open-ended questions aimed to obtain an in-depth analysis of the issues such as perceptions concerning males' becoming nurses and performing the nursing profession, social gender norms about the nursing profession, the contribution of male nurses to the profession, and the effect of male nurses' involvement in the profession on society. For content validity, 3 expert opinions were received for the construction of the questions, their order, and comprehensibility of the statements; revisions were then made in line with their suggestions. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with three female nurses, and the interview form was revised in line with their feedback.

#### **2.4. Data collection**

Data were collected between 15-30 November 2019 through face-to-face interviews. The participants were given appointments for the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a private room using a voice recorder. Each interview took about 10 to 15 minutes.

#### **2.5. Statistical analysis**

Data analysis was performed using the content analysis method. Data obtained from the interviews were transcribed by two researchers separately and the differences were reviewed. A 41-page written document of the transcripts was obtained. The participating nurses were asked to read the texts for confirmation. The data obtained were coded by two researchers under four titles to form themes and theme clusters related to their perceptions of male involvement in the nursing profession. Themes are structures that collect the codes under some specific categories. The themes used in the content analysis were formed by bringing similar codes together and interpreting them. Agreement between the researchers who performed the coding was reached using the agreement percentage recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) for reliability analysis. While the Reliability = (Agreement) / (Agreement + Disagreement) formula was used, the codes used by the researchers in the same way were accepted as agreement and the codes used differently were accepted as disagreement. Calculations indicated the agreement percentage as 0.92. An agreement percentage of over 70% as a result of this analysis indicates reliability. The themes and theme clusters obtained were transformed into frequencies and presented in tables. Presentation of the findings included excerpts with abbreviations indicating the participants (for example P1).

#### **2.6. Ethical approval**

Approval from the XX University Faculty of Medicine Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee was obtained (Number: 2019/93-18). The participants were informed about the study, and their consent was received. After the transcripts were prepared, the voice records were deleted and the data documented as texts were shared with the participants again for review and confirmation. No names were used in the presentation of the data.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Perceptions concerning males' becoming nurses /performing the nursing profession

All of the participants reportedly had positive perceptions concerning male nurses' performing the nursing profession. The factors contributing to the positive perceptions concerning males' performing the nursing profession included advantages for the profession, physical characteristics, and gender themes (Table 1).

**Table-1:** Distribution of the Reasons for the Participants' Positive Perceptions about Males' Performing the Nursing Profession

Themes	Codes	Number
<b>Advantages for the profession</b>	Improves the profession	9
	Increases the value given to the profession	6
	Helps to earn respect	6
	Increases diversity	3
	Increases patient satisfaction	4
	Improves professionalism	2
	Increases communication between colleagues	2
<b>Physical characteristics</b>	Increases willingness	1
	Enhances workforce benefit	5
	Demonstrates emotional differences	2
<b>Gender</b>	Enables flexible working hours	2
	Males also should become nurses	10
	There should be no gender discrimination	7
	They have no maternity roles	2

Some excerpts are as follows,

“I have positive feelings about it; males also should become nurses. I believe that it is beneficial in terms of both workforce and diversity...” (P1)

“I think that males should be in the profession... When we work together with our male colleagues, we can help each other and we benefit from their workforce. I guess when male



nurses started working, people's perceptions about female nurses also changed positively" ..."  
(P8)

"I believe that males also should become nurses...I think they will improve the profession and help the profession to gain respect..." (P12)

### **3.2. Perceptions concerning gender in the nursing profession**

The participants' perceptions were collected under the themes of positive and negative perceptions (Table 2).

**Table-2:** Distribution of the Participants' Perceptions about Gender in terms of the Nursing Profession

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
<b>Positive Perceptions</b>	No gender discrimination should be demonstrated	12
	Males could also become nurses	12
	Patients could prefer male nurses	4
<b>Negative Perceptions</b>	Lack of practice skills	2
	Lack of maternal characteristics	2

Some excerpts are as follows,

"Surely they can perform the nursing profession. Nursing is not a profession that requires gender discrimination. After all, it is about health, both men and women are careful with regards to patient privacy. I see no problems. I want men to become nurses." (P3)

"...Although we state that the gender of the patient is not an issue, some patients could have preferences; male patients might prefer male nurses." (P7)

"Males should also become nurses to change perceptions about nursing..." (P11)

### **3.3. Perceptions concerning the contribution of male nurses to the nursing profession**

All of the participants stated that male nurses had positive contributions to the nursing profession. These perceptions were collected under the contributions to the scientific features and contributions to the individual feature's themes (Table 3).

**Table-3:** The Participants’ Perceptions about Male Nurses’ Contribution to the Nursing Profession

Themes	Codes	Number
<b>Contributions concerning scientific features</b>	Bring the opportunity of scientific sharing	4
	Are willing to have a master's and doctorate degree	1
	Participate in scientific meetings	1
	Can adapt to innovations well	2
<b>Contributions concerning individual features</b>	Have good communication	12
	Increase in patient satisfaction	6
	A decrease in exposure to violence rates	3
	Increase in respect to the profession	3
	Increase in the value given to the profession	2
	Increase in the respect to female nurses	2

Some excerpts are as follows,

“I think the public is positive about it. The presence of male nurses could be an advantage for male patients for sharing issues they cannot share with us or things they feel shy about; they may feel more comfortable... at first, the public used to consider that male nurses were doctors. Sometimes we were not sure how to address them, as nurse or something else...” (P2)

“...When male nurses started working, society’s perceptions about the nursing profession changed...I think this is something positive in terms of nursing. Communication has changed; the content of the conversations has become more scientific...” (P4).

“It contributes to the development of the profession...There is a great need for male nurses in intensive care units.” (P5)

### **3.4. Perceptions concerning the effects of male nurses’ performing the nursing profession on society**

The participants stated that males’ performing the nursing profession has positive and negative effects on society (Table 4).

**Table-4:** The Participants’ Perceptions about Male Nurses’ Performing the nursing Profession on Society

Themes	Codes	Number
<b>Positive effects</b>	Overcoming bias	11
	Positive views about the profession	8
	Right to choose a nurse, patient satisfaction	7
	Increase in respect for the profession	5
<b>Negative effects</b>	Problems in seeing males in the role of nurses	6
	Communication problems	2
	Patient Dissatisfaction	2
	Addressing Problems	2

Some excerpts are as follows,

“Addressing males as nurses was a problem in society. There was a tendency to see them in different roles. This has changed with the increase in the number of male nurses. (P1)

“I think society is positive about this...” (P2).

“Patient relatives are happy. I have never experienced a negative reaction. Society was first surprised but then got used to it because people began to have male nurses in their family, which is good.” (P5)

“...People are surprised when they see male nurses, but now they are getting used to it. Things have changed; they have accepted it and they are happy...” (P6)

“... Negative perceptions regarding the female professions have changed; biases have been eliminated, but there are still problems with seeing male nurses in nurse roles.” (P10)

## 4. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the majority of the participants had positive perceptions concerning males’ performing the nursing profession. Recent studies in literature also reported positive changes in the perceptions of society and female nurses about male nurses (Shah et al., 2017, pp.1-3; Abdelrahman & Abdelkader, 2016, pp.46-55; Cheng, Tseng, Hodges, & Chou, 2018, pp.46-53) however, various difficulties such as discrimination and isolation experienced



by male nurses are also reported (Blackley, Morda, & Gill, 2019, pp.690-697; Kahraman et al., 2015, pp.108-144; Zhang & Tu, 2020, pp. 441-449). Similar studies conducted with nurses, midwives, and nursing students also reported that participants had positive attitudes towards male nurses (Abdelrahman & Abdelkader, 2016, pp.46-55; Stanley et al., 2016, pp.1-6).

The majority of the participants in this study stated that there should be no gender discrimination in the nursing profession and that males also could perform nursing. Although several studies indicate that male nurses could be as good as female nurses and that males should be present in the field of health care (Arslan & Ağaçdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166; Büyük, Rizalar, & Korkmaz, 2015, pp.729-736), there are also studies indicating that nursing was viewed as a profession unique to females by students and the public (Bartfay & Bartfay, 2016, pp.255-262; Saatci, 2019). This difference between the studies might be associated to social changes, which might have changed the gender perception about the nursing profession. Male nurses' performing the nursing profession is believed to be of importance in terms of eliminating the association of the care giver's social role with gender roles (Arslan & Ağaçdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166). Improvement of the nursing image and the desire for enhancing balance among genders are reported to be the factors helping positive perceptions about male nurses' performing the nursing profession (Abdelrahman & Abdelkader, 2016, pp.46-55).

When males choose to join the nursing profession, they might face social resistance in being accepted to the profession because their traditional gender roles are put at risk (Kahraman et al., 2015, pp.108-144). Studies found that gender discrimination remained relatively prevalent in the nursing profession (Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al., 2015, pp.140-3). The positive findings about gender indicated that the participants believed there should be no gender discrimination, males could also become nurses, and they had positive perceptions about patient rights. As to the negative perceptions, the participants mentioned the lack of the necessary skills and maternal characteristics of males. The literature also indicates that due to gender roles, male nurses sometimes have difficulties in the professions that are more typically identified with females (Bartfay & Bartfay, 2016, pp.255-262; Kahraman et al., 2015, pp.108-144).

The literature includes studies reporting that nursing and different student groups saw nursing as a female profession and found males' choosing the nursing profession as comical, that the nursing profession is not appropriate for males, and that they wanted to receive care from female nurses (Bartfay & Bartfay, 2016, pp.255-262; Ekinçi et al., 2014, pp.632-645). However, there are also a studies indicating that the nursing profession is specific to both genders and can be performed by males as well (Arslan & Ağaçdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166; Bascı & Yilmazel, 2016, pp.68-74). It is stated that some patient groups have positive opinions about male nurses (Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al., 2015, pp.140-3; Büyük et al., 2015, pp.729-736). A study conducted on ten male patients by LeBlanc et al. (2019) found that participants reported no gender preference for their nurses. And in the same study the majority of patients agreed that the nature of the task did not matter in their preference for a male or female nurse (LeBlanc, Bryanton & Wood, 2019, pp. 115-122). A study conducted by Budu et



al. (2019) to assess patients' preference for, and satisfaction with nursing care provided by male nurses at the medical and surgical wards indicated that females described male nurses as polite and courteous and were comfortable with their treatment (Budu et al., 2019, pp.1-9). There is a study indicating a social view believing that males should perform the nursing profession and should definitely be present in the profession (Erer et al., 2017, pp.137-156). On the other hand, there is a study indicating a social view believing that nursing should be performed only by females (Saatci, 2019). Male nurses' performing the nursing profession is reported to be important in terms of eliminating the social role of the caregiver associated with gender (Arslan & Agaçdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166). In line with all these study results, it seems that the gendered patterns of nursing seem to have begun to be eliminated.

A remarkable finding was that all of the participants reported that male nurses positively contributed to the nursing profession with their scientific and individual characteristics. In line with the findings of the present study, there are studies reporting that male nurses' becoming nurses improves the image of the profession, turns the profession into a more reputable career option, and decreases biases about nursing (Arslan & Agaçdiken-Alkan, 2016, pp.146-166; Bascı & Yilmazel, 2016, pp.68-74; Erer et al., 2017, pp.137-156).

The nurses participating in this study mostly mentioned the workforce advantages and flexibility in terms of working hours and thus had positive perceptions about male nurses' being in the profession. Physical power is reported to be an advantage for the acceptance of male nurses (Abdelrahman & Abdelkader, 2016, pp.46-55; Evans, 2004, pp.321-328; Shah et al., 2017, pp.1-3). Similar studies conducted in Turkey reported results emphasizing male nurses' physical power (Ekinci et al., 2014, pp.632-645; Kahraman et al., 2015, pp.108-144). Male nurses' being accepted with their "power" and strength" characteristics might indicate that the stereotype of men and women in society is maintained.

The participants in this study were found to think that male nurses' performing the nursing profession had both positive and negative effects on society. In line with the findings of the present study, the literature also indicates that receiving care from male nurses caused shyness, hesitation, astonishment, and unresponsiveness (Saatci, 2019). In this regard, perceptions of society about male nurses seem to cause different emotional and behavioral reactions.

### **Limitations of the study**

The present study is limited to the year 2018 in terms of time; Sarıcam, Adana in terms of location (in south of Turkey); 12 female nurses (3 worked in intensive care units, 3 in emergency units, 3 in internal diseases clinics, and 3 in surgery clinics) in terms of the participants; and perceptions of female nurses concerning male nurses in terms of the phenomenon that was investigated.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study found that the participants had positive perceptions concerning male nurses' performing the nursing profession; they believed males' presence in the profession has brought advantages and will continue to bring advantages to the profession and that there should be no gender discrimination in the profession. The public was first surprised to see males as nurses but then got used to and accepted it. Males' performing the nursing profession has had both positive and negative effects on society. In addition, studies with a larger sample of male and female nurses, student nurses, and patients should be conducted to investigate the issue qualitatively and quantitatively.

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