

Determining Nurses' Professional Image Perceptions:

A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

Hemşirelerin Mesleki İmaj Algılarının Belirlenmesi:

Tanımlayıcı-Kesitsel Bir Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The nursing image is built on a tripod of the public, nursing students, and nurses. Determining how each leg of this tripod perceives the nursing is crucial to improving the professional image. This study aimed to determine the nursing image perceptions among nurses at a private hospital group in Istanbul.

Material-Method: This descriptive-cross-sectional study was carried out with 428 nurses at four private hospitals affiliated with a foundation university in Istanbul. Data were collected through a random sampling method using a self-administered questionnaire, including a personal information form, and The Image Scale for Nursing Profession. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal Wallis-H variance analysis.

Results: Nurses generally perceived the nursing image as positive with a median score of 169 (160-177) out of 210. Nursing image for gender and professional status subscales was perceived more negatively than others, with median scores of 23 (19-28) and 19 (17-22), respectively. Nurses who were female ($p=0.007$), younger than 22 years ($p=0.001$), unwilling to re-choose nursing as a career ($p=0.001$), had professional experience less than a year ($p=0.002$), and worked more than 55 hours a week ($p=0.000$) perceived nursing image more negatively.

Conclusion: The results of this study showed that nurses working at a private hospital group had positive perceptions of the nursing image at a high level, except in terms of gender and professional status. Reflecting a gender equality perspective on nursing management, employing only undergraduate nurses for nursing, and planning an effective work schedule are recommended.

Keywords: History of nursing, nurses, nurses' role, nursing

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Ö Z E T

Amaç: Hemşirelik imajı, genel olarak toplum, hemşirelik öğrencileri ve hemşireler olmak üzere üçlü bir saç ayağı üzerine kurulmuştur. Her saç ayağının hemşireliği nasıl algıladığını belirlemek, mesleki imajı geliştirmek için oldukça önemlidir. Bu araştırmada, İstanbul'da özel bir hastane grubunda çalışan hemşirelerin hemşirelik imajı algılarını belirlemek amaçlanmıştır.

Materyal-Metot: Tanımlayıcı- ilişki arayıcı araştırma, İstanbul'da özel bir vakıf üniversitesine bağlı dört hastanede çalışan 428 hemşire ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Kişisel Bilgi Formu ve Hemşirelik Mesleğine Yönelik İmaj Ölçeğini içeren öz bildirim dayalı bir anket aracılığıyla rasgele örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak veriler toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tanımlayıcı istatistikler, Mann-Whitney U testi ve Kruskal Wallis-H varyans analizi kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Hemşireler, 210 puan üzerinden 169 (160-177) medyan puanı ile genel olarak hemşirelik imajını olumlu olarak algılamıştır. Cinsiyet ve mesleki statü alt boyutlarına yönelik hemşirelik imajı, sırasıyla 23 (19-28) ve 19 (17-22) medyan puanları ile diğer alt boyutlara göre daha olumsuz algılanmıştır. Kadın ($p=0,007$), 22 yaşından genç ($p=0,001$), mesleki deneyim süresi bir yılın altında olan ($p=0,002$), haftada 55 saatten fazla çalışan ($p=0,000$) ve hemşireliği kariyer olarak tekrar seçmek için isteksiz olan ($p=0,001$) hemşirelerin, hemşirelik imajını daha olumsuz algıladıkları belirlenmiştir.

Sonuç: Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, özel bir hastane grubunda çalışan hemşirelerin, cinsiyet ve mesleki durum dışında, hemşirelik imajına ilişkin olumlu algılarının yüksek düzeyde olduğunu göstermiştir. Hemşirelik yönetimine toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği bakış açısının yansıtılması, hemşirelik için sadece lisans hemşirelerin istihdam edilmesi ve etkin bir çalışma takviminin planlanması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hemşirelik tarihi, hemşireler, hemşirenin rolü, hemşirelik



1. Introduction

The nursing profession has the highest level of interaction with the public and plays a key role in providing quality and safe healthcare, with nearly 28 million members comprising 59% of the global healthcare workforce [1]. Despite this strategic importance, the professional image is still among the global problems of nursing.

Nursing image is defined as the sum of beliefs, views, and observations about nurses and nursing [2]. Studies with nursing students and nurses in different geographical regions reported that nursing image is a significant ongoing problem. As a result of these studies, nursing has been defined as a job rather than a profession that helps physicians, has negative working conditions, cares, and cleans, is low paid, limited career opportunities, and low social status, value, and prestige. In addition, nurses and nursing students are perceived as women, altruistic, helpful, obedient, and dependent [3-7]. However, the media often portray nurses and nursing with stereotypes of angels of mercy, the sexual object, the physician's handmaiden, and battle-axe, highlighting femininity and powerlessness [4-6]. A negative public nursing image threatens the quality and safety of healthcare by affecting nurses' competence development, mental health, work behaviours, and job satisfaction [6-8]. Besides, such a negative image perception may result in a more powerless workforce providing healthcare services to the public in the future by causing less qualified and reluctant candidates to choose nursing as a career [9]. As a result, a negative image affects nursing candidates and members negatively and is negatively reflected in the public's perceptions of the nursing image.

Türkiye had less than three nurses per 1.000 population, which was the lowest number of nurses among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries in 2018 [10]. Therefore, attempts to increase the number of nurses for the ideal nursing workforce in recent years have led to

qualitative differences among nurses. Although nursing education was started at the undergraduate level in Türkiye in 1955, health vocational high schools continued to educate nurses simultaneously until 2014. In the same year, graduates of health vocational high schools were given the title of assistant nurse and their duties, authorities and responsibilities were defined legally [11]. Therefore, today's nursing workforce consists of members who graduated from undergraduate programs and secondary education in Türkiye. Midwives who graduated from undergraduate programs perform nursing roles and responsibilities in different working units despite having job descriptions in the neonatal unit, maternity unit, and gynaecology wards. Emergency medicine, dialysis, operating room, and elderly care technicians who graduate from associate programs perform nursing duties and authority in working units other than job descriptions [12]. As a result, nursing services in Türkiye are provided to the public by nurses and health employees graduating from secondary education, associate programs, and undergraduate programs.

Studies in different geographical regions and different periods in Türkiye reported that nursing students and the Turkish public had moderate positive perception levels of nursing image [13-20]. In a study of eleven Turkish films, nursing was defined as a profession that lacks professional autonomy, ignores independent roles, and helps physicians [21]. As a result, the nursing image is built on a tripod of the public, nursing students, and nurses. Determining how each leg of this tripod perceives the nursing and nurses is crucial to improving the nursing image. Previous studies have examined nurses' perceptions of the nursing image working at public hospitals in Istanbul [22], in the paediatric units of public and university hospitals in Ankara [23], and in the surgical units of a private hospital in Istanbul [24]. However, studies on nurses' perceptions of the professional image at private hospitals are limited in Türkiye. From this point of view, the study was carried out to determine the nursing image perceptions among nurses at a private hospital group in Istanbul. This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of the nursing image perceptions among nurses?
- Does the level of the nursing image perceptions change through the personal characteristics of nurses?

2. Material and Method

Design and Setting

A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted from January to March 2019, in Türkiye. The study setting included four private hospitals located in Istanbul. Private hospitals are equipped with over 300 beds in emergency services, paediatric, gynaecology, internal medicine, and surgery, as well as coronary, adult, and paediatric intensive care units. Further, these hospitals are affiliated with a foundation university in Istanbul.

Sample and Participants

The population consisted of all nurses working at the time of the study and meeting the inclusion criteria: (a) to be a full-time nurse, (b) to be employed for at least three months, and (c) willing to participate in this study. The exclusion criterion was an incomplete filling of the study instrument. The sample size was calculated using an online sample size calculator at <https://clincalc.com/stats/samplesize.aspx>. The sample size was determined as 417 nurses according to a previous study (24), based on 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Questionnaires were distributed to 493 nurses using a random sampling method to allow for a non-response level of approximately 20%.

Instruments

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire including a personal information form, and Image Scale for Nursing Profession.

A personal information form is designed by researchers to question personal characteristics. These characteristics included age, gender, marital status, education level, length of professional and institutional experience, working shift, working unit, work position, working hours a week, and willingness to re-choose nursing as a career.

The Image Scale for Nursing Profession, developed by Dost and Bahcecik (2015), was used to determine nurses' perceptions of the nursing image. It consists of 42 items and six subscales:

professional qualifications (11 items), working conditions (10 items), gender (8 items), education (5 items), professional status (5 items) and appearance (3 items). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale with ranges from "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree". Fifteen items are reverse-scored. The total score is created by summing and ranges from 42 to 210. Higher scores indicate positive perceptions of the nursing image. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the original version was 0.88 [25].

Data Collection

Researchers reached out to nurses at shift change. Researchers gave the questionnaires to the nurses at the beginning of the shift. At the end of the shift, the researchers received from nurses the completed questionnaires. The mean response time for the questionnaires was determined as 10-15 minutes. Overall, 493 nurses completed the questionnaire (response rate: 86.8%), although 63 filled questionnaires incompletely were excluded. Consequently, 428 questionnaires were analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was approved by the Non-Invasive Research Ethics Committee, Istanbul Medipol University (Date: 14.11.2018; Decision Number: 662) and written approval was obtained from the hospitals to collect data. The personal characteristics of nurses' identities remained confidential, and each nurse's anonymity was assured by assigning each nurse a code number. Participation in this study was voluntary; participants were informed about this study verbally and gathered consent forms.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 25.0) at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The personal characteristics of nurses were summarized into numbers with percentages. As a result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the Image Scale for Nursing Profession showed non-normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). The score of the scale was reported as the median score (Q1-Q3). The mean rank of two independent groups was compared with the Mann-Whitney U test, as Kruskal Wallis-H analysis of variance was used to compare more than two independent groups. The internal consistency of the scales was calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

3. Results

Personal Characteristics

The mean age of nurses was 26.3 years (range: 19-52; SD:5.4) with a small percentage of nurses younger than 22 years (16.8%). Most nurses were female (75.7%) and single (59.1%). More than half of nurses had a health vocational high school level (52.8%). Approximately half of the nurses had 1 to 5 years of professional (40.6%) and hospital (48.4%) experience. Almost two-thirds were willing to re-choose nursing as a career (61.4%). Approximately half of the nurses worked in inpatient services (44.2%), day shifts (42.8%), and 46 to 55 hours a week (52.8%).

Descriptive Results

Table 1: Descriptive results of Image Scale of Nursing Profession (n=428)

Scale and Subscales	Median (Q1-Q3)	Cronbach's Alpha
Image Scale of Nursing Profession (42-210) *	169 (160-177)	0.80
Professional Qualification (11-55) *	50 (46-53)	0.82
Working Conditions (10-50) *	44 (41-46)	0.70
Gender (8-40) *	23 (19-28)	0.75
Education (5-25) *	21 (18-23)	0.70
Professional Status (5-25) *	19 (17-22)	0.73
Appearance (3-15) *	14 (12-15)	0.84

*: Score ranges of the scale and subscales

Table 1 summarized the data on nurses' perceptions towards nursing image as median scores (Q1-Q3). The median score for the nursing image among nurses was 169 (160-177), which was a high level. Similarly, nurses had the highest level of nursing image perceptions on the subscales of appearance

with a median score of 14 (12-15), professional qualifications with a median score of 50 (46-53), working conditions with a median score of 44 (41-46), education with a median score of 21 (18-23). The highest scores on these subscales are 15, 55, 50, and 25 respectively. The nursing image perceptions towards professional status subscale was accepted at a moderate level with a median score 19 (17-22) since the highest score on this subscale is 50. Also, the nursing image perceptions towards gender subscale was at a low level with a median score 23 (19-28) since the highest score on this subscale is 40. In this study, the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.80$) and all subscales (Cronbach's α 0.70-0.84) demonstrated acceptable reliability.

Comparative Results

As presented in Table 2, nurses who were younger than 22 years ($p=0.001$), female ($p=0.007$), unwilling to re-choose nursing as a career ($p=0.001$), had professional experience less than a year ($p=0.002$), and worked 45 hours a week ($p=0.000$) perceived nursing image more negatively. There was no significant difference between nurses' other personal characteristics and perceptions of nursing image ($p>0.05$).

Table 2: Comparative results between personal characteristics and the nursing image perceptions of nurses (n=428)

Personal Characteristics	Image Scale for Nursing Profession	
	Mean Rank	Test and p
Age Groups		
Younger than 22 years ^a	164.24	KW=15.450 p= 0.001 a<b,d
22-25 years ^b	216.30	
26-29 years ^c	230.50	
Older than 30 years ^d	230.62	
Gender		
Female	205.43	Z=-2.678 p=0.007
Male	242.75	
Marital Status		
Married	219.65	Z=-0.716 p=0.474
Single	210.94	
Educational Level		
High school/associate level	207.69	Z=-1,425 p=0.154
Undergraduate/Postgraduate level	225.15	
Professional Experience		
Less than a year ^a	169.35	KW=12.719 p=0.002 a<b,c
1-5 years ^b	224.98	
6 years or more ^c	224.15	
Hospital Experience		
Less than a year ^a	208.78	KW=0.391 p=0.823
1-5 years ^b	216.96	
6 years or more ^c	216.89	
Working Units		
Outpatient units	230.91	KW=4.148 p=0.386
Inpatient units	219.94	
Emergency service	218.47	
Operating room	201.43	
Intensive care unit	192.62	
Working Shift		
Days	218.91	KW=2.630 p=0.269
Nights	192.01	
Rotating	218.43	
Work hours a week		
45 hours ^a	261.27	KW=21.657 p=0.000 c<b<a
46-55 hours ^b	209.72	
More than 55 hours ^c	181.58	
Willingness to re-choose nursing as a career		
Willing ^a	225.26	KW=14.111 p=0.001 b<a,c
Unwilling ^b	161.64	
Unstable ^c	220.55	

KW: Kruskal-Wallis variance analyses Z: Mann-Whitney U test

Table 3: Comparative results between some personal characteristics and nurses' nursing image perceptions towards subscales (n=428)

Personal Characteristics	Professional Qualifications		Working Conditions		Gender		Education		Professional Status		Appearance	
	Mean Rank	Test and p	Mean Rank	Test and p	Mean Rank	Test and p	Mean Rank	Test and p	Mean Rank	Test and p	Mean Rank	Test and p
Age Groups												
Younger than 22 years ^a	212.07	KW=2.886 p=0.410	188.06	KW=15.264 p=0.002 a,b,c<d	185.10	KW=8.263 p=0.041 a<b,c	165.97	KW=16.315 p=0.001 a<b,c,d	180.90	KW=8.241 p=0.041 a<c,d	193.65	KW=3.694 p=0.296
22-25 years ^b	213.97		202.75		224.23		223.16		211.43		211.09	
26-29 years ^c	203.10		212.82		231.06		237.68		224.86		222.36	
Older than 30 years ^d	232.07		256.57		200.58		208.86		232.62		226.32	
Gender												
Female	217.49	Z=-0.880	213.60	Z=-0.265	220.93	Z=-1.889	215.31	Z=-0.238	203.06	Z=-3.368	198.90	Z=-4.724
Male	205.30	p=0.379	217.27	p=0.791	194.71	p=0.059	212.01	p=0.812	249.70	p=0.001	262.49	p=0.000
Professional Experience												
Less than a year ^a	229.82	KW=2.346 p=0.309	151.78	KW=27.936 p=0.000 a<b,c	205.90	KW=3.741 p=0.154	229.36	KW=1.424 p=0.491	186.15	KW=5.483 p=0.064	193.90	KW=2.985 p=0.225
1-5 years ^b	204.89		216.46		204.42		210.00		216.45		221.71	
6 years or more ^c	217.21		240.64		228.28		212.36		225.14		216.51	
Work hours a week												
45 hours ^a	232.31	KW=18.881 p=0.000 b<a,c	204.28	KW=1.518 p=0.468	203.05	KW=14.256 p=0.001 c>a,b	248.48	KW=9.572 p=0.008 a>b,c	265.05	KW=35.701 p=0.000 a>b>c	256.65	KW=15.553 p=0.000 a>b,c
46-55 hours ^b	190.65		213.75		201.05		204.49		217.33		202.96	
More than 55 hours ^c	249.38		225.55		254.02		204.65		161.71		200.41	
Willingness to re-choose nursing as a career												
Willing ^a	226.64	KW=6.619 p=0.037 a>b,c	216.46	KW=0.629 p=0.730	215.14	KW=3.987 p=0.136	216.98	KW=6.293 p=0.043 b<a<c	224.13	KW=8.415 p=0.015 b<a<c	218.94	KW=8.562 p=0.014 b<a<c
Unwilling ^b	194.17		203.33		189.72		181.42		174.62		175.48	
Unsure ^c	195.79		216.62		228.93		229.50		215.10		228.20	

KW: Kruskal-Wallis variance analyses Z: Mann-Whitney U test

Table 3 summarized the comparative results between nurses' personal characteristics and subscales of nursing image. Nurses who were younger than 22 years had lower nursing image perceptions in the subscales of working conditions ($p=0.002$), gender ($p=0.041$), education ($p=0.001$), and professional status ($p=0.041$). Male nurses had higher nursing image perceptions towards professional status ($p=0.001$) and appearance ($p=0.000$). Nurses with less than a year of professional experience had significantly lower perceptions of the nursing image towards working conditions ($p=0.000$). Nurses who worked 46 to 55 hours a week had significantly lower nursing image perceptions towards professional qualifications ($p=0.000$). Also, nurses working more than 56 hours a week had significantly higher perceptions of the nursing image towards gender ($p=0.001$). Nurses working 45 hours a week had significantly higher nursing image perceptions towards education ($p=0.008$), professional status ($p=0.000$), and appearance ($p=0.000$). Whereas nurses who were unwilling to re-choose nursing as a career had significantly lower perceptions in the subscales of education ($p=0.043$), professional status ($p=0.015$), and appearance ($p=0.014$), nurses who were willing had significantly higher perceptions towards professional qualifications ($p=0.037$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Determining the professional image perceptions of the nurses is essential to contribute to the consolidating of professional identity and consequently increase the place of nurses in public. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the nursing image perceptions among nurses at a private hospital group in Istanbul. In this study, nurses perceived the nursing image as highly positive with a median score of 169 (160-177). Studies in other countries have reported different results related to the nursing image perceptions of nurses. Nurses had a highly positive professional image in Egypt, Israel, Iran, and East Africa [7, 26-28], whereas Vietnamese, Nigerian, and Indonesian nurses perceived that the nursing profession has a negative image [29-31]. The nursing image varies globally from country to country. Therefore, nurses may perceive the nursing image more negatively, especially in low-income countries with less advanced health and nursing systems and a shortage of nursing workforce markedly.

Previous studies using the same scale in Türkiye reported lower image perceptions of nurses than this study, at a moderate level [22,23]. However, a study conducted with surgical nurses in a private hospital found that the professional image perceptions of nurses were at a low level. The authors explained the reason for low professional image perception as nurses' short-term professional experiences and patients' needs outside of healthcare [24]. Among nursing students in Türkiye, the professional image was perceived as moderately positive [16-20]. Similarly, studies using another scale reported that the public's perception of the nursing image was at a moderate level in Erzurum, Duzce and Istanbul [13-15]. In the literature, the nursing image perceptions of nurses, nursing students, and the public were lower than in this study. The main aim of private hospitals is to provide quality and safe healthcare services to gain a competitive advantage. The reasons for high professional image perceptions among nurses working in private hospitals may be having a more impressive appearance, performing professional roles and responsibilities more competently, working in more positive conditions, and following current scientific research through continuous education. Supporting this view, nurses in this study had a highly positive perception of the subscales of appearance, professional qualification, working conditions and education in the Image Scale for Nursing Profession, respectively.

Analysis of the subscales of The Image Scale for Nursing Profession revealed that nurses had highly positive perceptions of the other subscales, except for the gender and professional status subscale. Whereas nurses perceived the professional status subscale moderately, the professional image perceptions towards the gender subscale are at a low level.

Previous studies in Türkiye reported different results regarding the gender subscale: the most positive perceptions among nurses working in private hospitals [24], and the most negative perceptions among nursing students [18,19]. Additionally, Tarhan et al. (2020) reported that the Y generation in public perceived male nurses more positively than the other generations and there was no difference between the generations in terms of nurses being female [15]. Considering that three-quarters of the participants in this study were female, nursing is still considered a female-dominated profession in Türkiye. A systematic review reported that male nurses worked more in high-level important units such as emergency departments, intensive care units, and operating rooms rather than in obstetrics and paediatrics [32]. However, a qualitative study in Türkiye showed that males exclude females from advanced career positions in nursing by reflecting gender stereotypes on the profession and using symbolic violence. This strengthens the glass ceiling that limits the career advancement of females in nursing [33]. Additionally, males' perceptions of the nursing image were higher than females' significantly

in this study. Whereas males and females working in public and university hospitals in Türkiye and Israel perceived the nursing image at a similar level [22,23,26] males working in a private hospital had a higher perception of the nursing image than females [24]. Private hospitals had more advanced career opportunities than public and university hospitals. Male nurses may have the advantage of these career opportunities, particularly in managerial positions. Thus, male nurses may gain professional status, more pay, and a positive image. Supporting this view, the professional image perceptions of male and female nurses in this study showed significant differences only in the subscales of professional status and appearance.

Comparing this study, in the professional status subscale, whereas nursing students had similar perceptions [17,19,20] the perceptions of nurses working in private hospitals were lower [24]. Statements in the professional status subscale indicate that professional status is related to public image. Tarhan et al. (2020) highlighted that there was no difference between generations in terms of nursing as a profession with independent practices and high prestige [15]. The residents of Duzce regarded nurses as people carrying out secondary tasks, like assistants to physicians [14]. Sis Çelik et al. (2013) reported that nearly half of the residents in Erzurum partially agreed with the high prestige of nurses in society [13]. Therefore, in this study, nurses may have perceived the professional status subscale more negatively, considering the public image in Türkiye. Abdelrahman (2018) reported that there was a positive relationship between nurses' self-image and public image, and a negative relationship between nurses' self-image and self-esteem [7]. Another study determined that the perceived public image was to affect nurses' work performance and intentions to leave the profession [34]. Additionally, Grinberg and Sela (2022) showed the correlation between the nursing profession's self-image and self-reported good quality of care [26]. As a result, a negative public image may force private hospitals to seek strategies to improve nurses' self-image because of providing quality and safe healthcare services and maintaining the continuity of the nursing workforce.

Previous studies have shown different results regarding the comparative results between age groups and perception of the nursing image. Professional image perceptions of nurses working in public hospitals decrease according to age groups [22]. The professional image perceptions of paediatric nurses between the ages of 41 and 50 working in public and university hospitals were more positive [23]. In a study from Iran, the professional image perceptions of nurses aged 41 and above working in university hospitals were more positive [28]. In all these studies, comparative results between age groups and the professional image perceptions of nurses were reported without any significant difference. However, Aşçı (2019) found that surgical nurses between the ages of 20 and 25 working in a private hospital had significantly lower perceptions of professional image, consistent with the result of this study [24]. In general, nurses' perception of the professional image more positively can be explained by accepting as a member of the profession themselves. According to Higher Education Institution Statistics, undergraduate students in Türkiye are mainly between the years of 18 and 22 [35]. Therefore, most of the nurses younger than 22 years in this study may have graduated from an associate-level or vocational medical high school. Supporting this view, the professional image perceptions of undergraduate and postgraduate nurses were higher than vocational medical high school and associate-level graduates in this study, without any significant difference. In analyses of subscales, there was no significant difference in the subscales of professional qualifications and appearance. The main reason may be that private hospitals focused on patient satisfaction expect nurses at all educational levels to perform similar roles and responsibilities and have a positive appearance. However, the perceptions of nurses younger than 22 years regarding the subscales of gender, education and professional status were significantly lower. It is thought that most nurses in this group graduated from vocational medical high school or associate level. Nurses in this group may have perceived gender, education, and professional status as an unimportant part of the nursing image because they were educated focusing on technical skills rather than professional values and evidence-based practices.

In this study, nurses with longer professional experience had more positive perceptions of professional image. Whereas the professional image perceptions of nurses working in public and university hospitals were similar based on professional experience [22,23], nurses, who had long professional experience, had higher perceptions of the nursing image in a private hospital [24]. In Türkiye, nurses are employed in public and university hospitals for some periods of the year with an exam result called the Public Personnel Selection Exam. Therefore, new graduates usually enter the workforce in private hospitals. The main reason for lower nursing image perceptions among new graduate nurses may be a challenging period called transition shock that requires adapting to the healthcare system [36]. Supporting this view, in this study, nurses with less than a year of professional experience had lower nursing image perception in the subscale of working conditions. During this period, the main problems of new graduate nurses are

inexperience regarding professional practices, communicating and collaborating ineffectively, and exposing negative workplace behaviours [36]. A study found that nurses entered the profession with positive nurse image perceptions, but they developed negative perceptions about the profession, influenced by the work environment and interactions with experienced nurses [3]. As a result, private hospitals may need to consider the negative nursing image among new graduate nurses, especially in terms of the working environment, to facilitate the transition into practice.

In this study, only a quarter of the nurses stated that the working hours were 45 per week. This result is a small cross-section showing the nursing workforce shortage in Türkiye. However, nurses who worked 45 hours a week had more positive nursing image perceptions. Previous studies reported that the professional image perceptions of nurses who stated the number of nurses sufficient or insufficient was at a similar level [22,24]. Heavy workload is associated with fatigue, job stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout [37]. However, job dissatisfaction and turnover intention were associated with a poor nursing image [34,38]. These negative results by affecting self-concept and self-esteem levels may have caused nurses to perceive nursing as a negative career option. In support of this view, nurses who were unwilling to re-choose nursing as a career had significantly lower perceptions of the professional image in this study. Also, nurses working more than 55 hours a week in the gender subscale had higher image perceptions. Male nurses, who spend less time on home and family responsibilities than females, have more time for themselves than females [33]. Considering that most of the nurses in this study were female, nurses working more than 55 hours a week may think that males could cope with heavy workloads more easily due to these characteristics.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the nursing image was strongly positively perceived by nurses working in private hospitals. However, nursing image perceptions towards gender and professional status were more negative. Nurses who were younger than 22 years, female, unwilling to re-choose nursing as a career, had professional experience less than a year and worked 45 hours a week perceived nursing image more negatively.

Firstly, raising awareness about the effects of males in professionalism and planning a nursing workforce including males in all working units are recommended. Nursing management should reflect a gender equality perspective on promotion and wages, which give nurses a positive appearance and professional status. Secondly, nursing management should employ only undergraduate nurses to perform nursing duties, authority, and responsibilities. This may contribute to the perception of nursing as a professional profession integrating professional values and evidence-based practices, rather than a workforce profile performing only technical works, and increase the status of the profession. Also, a more professional nursing workforce may facilitate the transition into practice by contributing to a positive work environment and maintaining a positive perception of new graduate nurses' professional image. Thirdly, because the heavy workload is an essential factor for the poor image, nursing management should effectively plan weekly working hours and shifts to maintain the continuity of the workforce. Future studies should focus on gender discrimination in nursing, the factors affecting the image perceptions of undergraduate nurses, and innovative management approaches that will strengthen the professional image perceptions of nurses, especially new graduates.

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Declaration of Ethical Code

In this study, we undertake that all the rules required to be followed within the scope of the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" are complied with and that none of the actions stated under the heading "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" is not carried out.

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