

## Academic and Clinical Stress Levels and Profession Perceptions of Nursing Senior Students\*

### Hemşirelik Son Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Akademik ve Klinik Stres Düzeyleri ve Meslek Algıları

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**Abstract:** It is important to have a positive opinion and attitude when choosing and adapting to a profession and maintaining a productive working life. Nursing perception of final year students of vocational motivation, confidence, health professionals are important and affect their relationship with patients. The aim of this study is to determine the academic and clinical stress levels of undergraduate nursing students and their perceptions of the nursing profession. **Methods:** Data has been gathered using "Information Form", "Nursing Profession Perception Scale" and "Nursing Education Stress Scale". The sample of 183 senior nursing students. **Results:** Stress scale average score was 67.36+1.48. Students' profession perception scale mean was 88.95+1.32. Stress scale's academic stress subscale score average was 33.78+7.79 whereas the application subscale score average was 33.57+7.83. There is a significant difference between students' choice of the nursing profession and the academic stress scores. **Conclusion:** Female students chose nursing as a profession at a higher rate than males; more than half of the participants had nursing in their first five choices and are satisfied with that choice also, 80.90% of the participants chose this profession due to job security.

**Keywords:** Nursing student; clinical, stress; academic training; profession perception

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**Özet:** Meslek seçiminde, mesleğe uyum sağlamada ve verimli bir çalışma yaşamı sürdürmede o mesleğe ilişkin olumlu bir görüş ve tutuma sahip olmak mesleğin gelişimi açısından önemlidir. Bu adayların hemşirelik algısı motivasyonlarını, özgüvenlerini, diğer disiplinlerin üyeleri ve hastalarla olan ilişkilerini etkileyebileceğinden önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, lisans hemşirelik öğrencilerinin akademik ve klinik stres düzeylerini ve hemşirelik mesleğine ilişkin algılarını belirlemektir. **Yöntem:** Araştırma verileri "Tanıtım Formu", "Hemşirelik Mesleğini Algılama Ölçeği (HMAÖ)" ve Hemşirelik Eğitimi Stres Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Araştırma örneklemini son sınıf 183 hemşirelik öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. **Bulgular:** Öğrencilerin stres ölçek toplam puan ortalaması 67,36+1,48, meslek algısı ölçek toplam puan ortalaması 88,95+1,32. Öğrencilerin stres ölçek alt boyutlarında akademik stres puan ortalaması 33,78+7,79, uygulama stres puan ortalaması 33,57+7,83'tür. Öğrencilerin hemşirelik mesleğini seçmeleri ile akademik stres puanları arasında anlamlı bir fark bulundu. **Sonuç:** Çalışmada kız öğrencilerin erkeklere göre daha yüksek oranda hemşireliği seçtiği; katılımcıların yarısından fazlasının ilk beş tercihinde hemşirelik olduğu ve mesleği seçmekten memnun oldukları bulundu. Ayrıca öğrencilerin %80,90'ının iş garantisi nedeniyle mesleği seçtiği bulundu.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hemşirelik öğrencisi; klinik, stres; akademik eğitim; meslek algısı

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## INTRODUCTION

It is important to have a positive opinion and attitude when choosing and adapting to a profession and maintaining a productive working life (1). First year students are not expected to have a positive view of the nursing profession knowing the society's prejudices and not having a through knowledge about the profession. Foundations of professional consciousness are set during school years and is continued to be learned during professional life (2). During this growth period students learn nursing profession's philosophy, ethics and the requirements to be able to conduct their jobs effectively and efficiently.

The social structure of the society a person is in moulds that person's perception and attitude towards their profession (3). Due to that a person's social environment effects their perception of their profession. Students starting their nursing education may reflect society's view of nursing to the school (3). However, students' thoughts about nursing may change positively or negatively as they receive their theoretic and practical education.

The purpose of the nursing education is to continue to increase students' creativeness, critical thinking skills and personal growth. At the end of this educational growth process, students are expected to solve patients' health problems and protect and improve others' health using their critical thinking skills and what they've learned during their education (3). While trying to meet these expectations, students may have positive, traumatic and stressful experiences which may results in feelings of stress, hurt, and frustration (4). High or uncontrolled levels of stress may prohibit the student to develop professionally (5). At the same time an increased anxiety level may create feelings of failure and reduce students' desire to learn thus become a nurse (6, 7). Educators' lack of guidance to the students, not creating opportunities to allow students to think critically and not addressing student concerns regarding the profession are some factors that create problems (8). Therefore it is important that the educators are equipped with what's needed to support the students and solve problems that may arise.

Studies list educators, doctors, nurses, clinic, patients and clinical practice as reasons of stress during clinic practicum (9-11). Students list stressors during theoretical education as educators and other students. Also, a student's personality can be a reason for their stress. (9,12).

Senior students are candidates to become nursing professionals. These candidates' perception of nursing profession may affect their motivations, self-esteem and their interactions with coworkers and patients. Therefore, adopting and applying a professional approach after graduation is very important. The quality of the nursing service that will be provided is tied into nursing profession perception and professional ethics. The theoretical and practical education and ethical values students receive during their education will guide them during their professional work life. The experiences students have during four years of college may affect their perception of the profession. In this context, expected outcome is the positive change and strengthening of the occupation perception.

*Aim of the Research:* The aim of this study is to determine the academic and clinical stress levels of undergraduate nursing students and their perceptions of the nursing profession.

## METHODS

### Study Design and Participants

The study was conducted in accordance with the descriptive research method. The sample of the research was prepared by the Akdeniz University Nursing Department, Mustafa Kemal University Health Sciences Faculty Nursing Department and Yildırım Beyazıt University Health Sciences Faculty Nursing Department. Fourth grade students in the 2016-2017 academic year were included in the study. Out of 250 students who

attended classes a total of 183 students agreed to participate in the survey were included in the study. 73.31% of the universe was reached in the study.

“Information Form” created by researchers and “Nursing Profession Perception Scale” and “Nursing Educational Stress Scale” was used. (13, 14). The data collection form after the information was distributed to the students who agreed to participate in the study. It took about 15 minutes to complete the data collection form.

#### *Student Information Form:*

This form created by the researchers after literature review is composed of two sections and 19 items. 11 of the questions determine the socio demographic characteristics of the participant study design and participants whereas 8 questions pertain to professional characteristics. This form contains information like age, school, gender, working status, family type etc (13-15).

#### *Nursing Educational Stress Scale:*

This questionnaire developed by Rhead (1995) is a modified version of the scale developed by Gray-Toft and Anderson in 1981. The validity of this test in Turkish has been done by Karaca and friends in 2014. This 3 point Likert scale has two sub-dimensions and 21 items. First application stress sub-dimension: items 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32 2. Academic stress sub-dimension: items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, 23, 26, 28, 30 and 31 (14). Each sub-dimension is composed of 0-48 points where the total points are between 0-96. An increase in the points is an indication of an increase in the stress level. The Cronbach alpha confidence parameters are between 0.84 – 0.90 (Application stress Cronbach alpha 0.84, academic stress Cronbach alpha 0.83) (14) .

#### *Nursing Profession Perception Scale:*

This scale is composed of 22 questions and is a five point Likert scale developed by Eser et al (2006). This scale is composed of two subscales: “Professional Qualifications” containing expressions that define different aspects of the profession (17 items) (min 5, max 25); Occupational Status composed of expressions containing the place of the profession in society(5 items) (min 5, max 25). Professional Qualifications subscale includes statements related to intensive communication, need to make sacrifices, independent applications, tiring, depending on knowledge and skills, satisfying, hard working conditions, team work, use of technology, problem working skills, need for graduate degree. Occupational Status subscale includes statements measuring the position of the nursing between the other health care professions and its prestige (13). The Cronbach Alpha rank of the scale is 0.83 and the Cronbach Alpha rank of the Qualifications subscales is 0.85; Occupational Status is 0.79. The increase in the total score of the scale indicates that the occupational perception is in the positive direction (min 22, max 110) (13) .

## **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical authorization of this study has been given by the ethics committee of a University Faculty of Medicine on 12.05.2016 decision number 1. Permission was obtained from the institutions where the study was conducted. In addition the participants have been informed about the study prior to their participation and have filled out the data gathering form after they have indicated their verbal willingness.

## **Data Analysis**

SPSS for Windows 23.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used. Descriptive statistics were used for number, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Comparison of continuous variables of two independent groups that met parametric test assumptions Independent Samples T Test, Mann Whitney U test was used to compare two groups that did not meet parametric test assumptions. Kruskal-Wallis Analysis of Variance

was performed to compare more than two groups that did not meet parametric assumptions. The limit for statistical significance was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The average age of the participants was  $22.40 \pm 1.20$  of whom 69.4% were female and 30.6% were male. 97.3% of the participants are not employed and 90.2% have a nuclear family. 74.3% of the participants indicated their income to be “income covers outcome”.

27.9% of the participants (51 students) attend Akdeniz University Nursing School, 37.1% (68 students) attend Mustafa Kemal University Health Sciences Department and 35.5 % (64 students) attend Yıldırım Beyazıt University Health Sciences Department.

When the professional characteristics of the students are examined; 71.6% of the students stated that they preferred the nursing department among the first 5 preferences. When asked about the reasons for preferring nursing school, 80.9% stated that they preferred the department because it was a job guarantee. 43.2% of the participants stated that they partially adopted the nursing profession.

Students' average points on the Nursing Education Stress Scale and Nursing Profession Perception Scale are shown on Table 1. According to the total average points students' stress levels are found to be moderate and profession perception is found to be high.

**Table 1:** Nursing Stress Scale and Profession Perception Scale and Subscales total point averages (n=183)

	M (SD)	Min.	Max.	Cronba Alpha
<b>Nursing Education Stress Scale</b>	67.36+1.48	23	96	0.864
Application stress sub-dimension	33.57+7.83	11	48	0.845
Academic stress sub-dimension	33.78+7.79	8	48	0.888
<b>Nursing Profession Perception Scale</b>	88.95+1.32	31	110	0.908
Professional Qualifications	73.08+1.03	21	85	0.918
Occupational Status	15.86+5.21	5	25	0.838

Table 2 shows the reasons why students have picked Nursing as a field of Study. The top three reasons according to majority are; (1) work guarantee after graduation, (2) nursing being the best choice depending on their points on placement exam, and (3) family recommendation to choose the field.

**Table 2:** The reasons why students have picked nursing as a field of study (n=183)

	n*	%
Work guarantee after graduation	148	80.9
Because it is the most suitable section I can enter with the points I got from YGS-LYS exam	66	36.1
Because my family wanted the nursing profession	47	25.7
I love my nursing profession	43	23.5
Because the salary of the nursing profession is good	42	23.0
Nursing profession is suitable for my personality	33	18.0
Part-time and shift working conditions attractive to me	10	5.5

\* Students have picked more than one choice.

Table 3 shows the area students want to work in after graduation. More than half of the students (56.3%) indicated that they want to work as clinic nurses, more than one third (% 35.5) indicated that they would like to get a graduate degree while working and a small percentage (9.8%) indicated that they would like to work in a different field than nursing.

**Table 3:** The area of profession students want to work in after graduation (n=183)

	n*	%
Clinical nurses in public / private hospitals	103	56.3
To continue academic education (to make a master's degree)	65	35.5
Working in a field other than health related nursing	28	15.3
To read / study another chapter other than nursing	18	9.8

\* Students have picked more than one choice.

**Table 4:** Students' Nursing Stress Scale and Profession Perception Scale Subscale points (n=183).

	Nursing Educational Stress Scale			Nursing Profession Perception Scale		
	Application Stress		Academic Stress	Professional Qualifications		Occupational Status
	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	Statistical Evaluation	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	Statistical Evaluation	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	Statistical Evaluation
<b>School</b>	<b>n (%)</b>					
Akdeniz University	51(27.9)	32.72±8.82	35.49±7.97	70.84±1.07	15.07±5.39	
Mustafa Kemal University	68(37.1)	34.23±6.74	34.17±7.04	73.44±9.38	17.13±4.82	F=3.26 p=0.041
Yıldırım Beyazıt University	64(35.0)	33.56±8.14	32.01±8.16	74.50±1.07	15.15±5.27	
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	127(69.4)	34.96±7.05	34.39±7.56	74.39±9.34	16.11±4.97	MWU=2654.00
Male	56(30.6)	30.44±8.66	32.41±8.18	70.12±1.18	15.30±5.70	p=0.006*
<b>Age</b>						
20-22	121 (66.1)	33.98±7.73	34.01±7.60	73.41±9.41	15.96±5.21	MW=3620.50
23 and over	62 (33.9)	32.79±8.05	33.33±8.19	72.45±1.19	15.67±5.23	Z= -0.386 p=0.700
<b>Preference Ranking</b>						
1-5. preference	131(71.6)	34.47±7.87	34.68±7.75	74.63±7.86	15.78±5.08	
6-10. preference	33(18.0)	31.00±6.40	30.96±6.91	70.51±1.26	16.48±5.25	X <sup>2</sup> =0.861 p=0.650
11 and over	19(10.4)	31.89±8.90	32.47±8.53	66.89±1.66	15.36±6.13	
<b>Adopt Profession</b>						
Yes	122(66.7)	32.92±7.57	32.62±7.86	75.07±8.33	17.14±4.91	t=4.994 p=0.000*
No	61(33.3)	34.88±8.25	36.11±7.16	69.11±12.61	13.31±4.86	
<b>The Level of Satisfaction That Read With Section</b>						
0-5 point	74(44.0)	35.78±7.60	36.43±7.01	73.08±9.20	15.78±5.61	t=-1.177 p=0.265
6-10 point	94(56.0)	31.86±7.27	31.24±7.67	74.72±8.80	16.69±4.68	
<b>Compliance of Your Personal Features to the Nursing Department</b>						
0-5 point	55(32.2)	34.03±8.85	34.45±8.24	73.27±8.47	15.52±5.80	MWU=2927.00
6-10 point	116(67.8)	33.33±6.97	33.18±7.52	74.32±9.17	16.56±4.70	p=0.384 MWU=2861.00 p=0.275

\*p<0.05,  $\bar{X} \pm SS$ = Mean± Standard Deviation, MWU= Mann Whitney U Test, t: Independent sample t-test, Z: K Independent Samples (Kruskal-Wallis) Test.

Table 4 shows a comparison of Students' Nursing Stress Scale and Profession Perception Scale Subscale points.

When the demographic characteristics of the students were compared with the subscale scores of the occupational perception scale, there was a significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was found between the average scores of the school and the occupational perception scale subscale ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Professional qualification  $p = 0.022$ , professional status  $p = 0.041$ ). Also, when the average scores of the students' genders and occupational perception subscales were compared, occupational status subscale average points were found to be significantly different ( $p = 0.006$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The mean score of female students was found higher. In our study, a significant difference was found between the order of students' preference for the department and the mean scores of the sub-dimensions of the profession perception scale. The average score of those who made their preferences in the first five ranks was found to be higher ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no significant difference between the mean scores of two scales ( $p > 0.05$ ). In our study no significant difference was found when look at the order of preference of the students to the department and the mean scores of age and occupational perception scale sub-dimensions ( $p > 0.05$ ). In our study, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the application stress sub-dimensions scale was 0.86 and academic stress sub-dimensions scale was 0.84.

## DISCUSSION

One of the important factors in choosing a profession is job guarantee. In this context, health science emerges as one of the most preferred areas for students. In our study, 80.9% of the participants stated that they chose the occupation because of job guarantee, 36.1% said that the most suitable choice was nursing according to the placement score they received and 25.7% preferred it for family reasons. In the study conducted by Karadağ et al to determine the difficulties that student nurses experienced in clinical practice, most of the students stated that they preferred the occupation because of the high number of jobs available (16). Other factors that influence occupation preference are perception and expectation of the occupation.

In the study conducted, 53.9% of the nurses stated the profession was in accordance with their personal characteristics; 23.5% stated that they rated the occupation status high and only 17.6% reported being satisfied with their profession (17).

Also, a study published in 2015 stated that those who preferred nursing profession by preference have higher perception of care behaviors (18). In our study, the percentage of participants that chose nursing because they loved it was found to be 23.50%. However, the number of those who adopted nursing profession during nursing education is 66.7% which means that students' perceptions changed positively during their education. This will likely increase the professions progress and employee satisfaction positively. Pursuing nursing by choice contributes to professional values, attitudes, skills and knowledge to be adopted faster Having concerns about professional practice helps increase professional achievement. According to a study conducted by Karadağ et al the percentage of those choosing the profession because they loved it was 11% whereas those who chose it due to job guarantee was 52% (19). According to a study by İnce and Khorsid participants chose the profession without knowing it, solely due to job guarantee (20). The results of our study are similar in literature; possibility of finding employment after graduation was the main reason for the choice. In a study conducted in England 18.5 % of the high school students that participated stated that nursing is not a profession suitable for them; 5.1% saw nursing as a female profession; 39.5% of the males stated they didn't want to be nurses and that they didn't see nursing as a high status profession (21). In another study conducted, the percentage of those who are moderately satisfied in the nursing department was more than half (19) similar to our study where those expressed moderate to high rates of satisfaction were 56.0%. In our study 67.8% of those participated stated that nursing profession is a good fit to their character. Profession being a good fit to a person's character is an important factor that impacts job satisfaction, fulfillment and commitment.

In our study, we found that 71.6% of the participants placed this profession in their top five choices. According to a study conducted by Zencir and Eşer half of the participants placed this profession in their top three choices (22). Both of these studies indicate that there is a high rate of reasons to why participants chose the nursing profession.

In our study students' nursing education stress score mean is found to be 67.36+1.48. Students' academic and practicum stress scores are similar. There is no significant difference between scores of different universities. However, Yildirim Beyazıt University students' practicum anxiety mean scores and Akdeniz University students' academic stress mean scores are higher than other schools'. The difference in scores are thought to be due to the differences in infrastructure and student numbers in each school. In a study done it is stated that 65.8% of the students stress about nursing education (23).

A statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores of school and professional perception subscales. Akdeniz University Nursing Faculty students' mean scores were found to be lower than other schools'.

When looked at students' gender and professional perception subscale mean scores, there is a significant difference in the professional status subscale. In women, professional perception subscale mean scores are higher which might be due to higher female numbers in the nursing profession. It has also been in the last decades for men to take part in the nursing profession, which has been around for centuries as a women's profession. The low perception of nursing profession in men might be due to this fact. In a study done with nursing students, an inequality among regions has been noted. Each year the number of males choosing nursing profession has been increasing. The increase of males in the profession has had a positive effect (19). The acceptance of male students in the nursing profession has been contributing to the destruction of gender discrimination in the profession.

The work done with first and second year students to increase their perception of the nursing profession has created positive outcomes and as their years of education increased their perception increased (24). In our study, students' average score of occupational perception was found as 88.95 + 1.32. It is important that senior students' perception of profession be high. Adopting a profession and ethical values are important factors while working to be able to take good care of patients, to protect their rights and apply skills learned as solving ethical problems. Having strong professional perception helps students improve their autonomy and use of their autonomy after graduation. In another study done with first year students, those who haven't adopted the profession perceived clinical education as a threatening environment (25). In our study, we found that senior students have a high perception of the profession. Similarly, Altıok and Üstün emphasized the importance of students' educational experiences in order for students to develop their perception and values of the nursing profession (9). In studies conducted in this context, it was emphasized that the attitudes and approaches of the lecturers are important in nursing students' learning of professional knowledge and applications (26-29). According to Koy instructors' attitudes and behaviors are very effective in gaining professional and clinical skills and that educators should be role models in the clinics and support students while solving problems related to patients (30). In the study of Allari et al., (2020), it was found that instructors encouraged students to have positive clinical experiences and helped them improve their knowledge and performance levels (31).

In our study, the average score of the professional status subscale of the students was found to be moderate. It seems that society's view of occupation is related to the professional perceptions of professional members and students. In a study to determine occupational perceptions and expectations of nurses and midwives, the rate of those who rated the tasks and applications of nurses as respected by society was 8.1%, those who rated nursing as a trusted profession were 16.1% (17). In a study done with nursing students, participants stated that nursing is underrated as a profession in the society (19).

## CONSLUSIONS

In conclusion, female students chose nursing as a profession at a higher rate than males; more than half of the participants had nursing in their first five choices and are satisfied with that choice; also, participants chose this profession due to job security. The average nursing education stress level was 67.36 whereas nursing profession perception average point was 88.95. Sociodemographic characteristics of senior nursing students were compared in terms of some variables. According to the results of the analysis, it was found that the academic and practical stress scores and the occupational status scores of the women were higher. Likewise, it was seen that the students who were in the top five preferences of the nursing department and were satisfied with the department they studied had high academic and practice stress scores. It was determined that the occupational perception scores of the students who stated that they adopted the profession were significantly higher than the students who stated that they did not adopt the profession.

## LIMITATION

The sample was not selected in the study. A total of 250 nursing senior students attending classes and those who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study.

## DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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