

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

# Metaphorical Perceptions of High School Senior Students Regarding the Nursing Profession

## Lise Son Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Hemşirelik Mesleğine İlişkin Metafor Algıları

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study was conducted to determine the metaphorical perceptions of the nursing profession among high school seniors.

**Methods:** This research was conducted among final year high school students studying at 8 schools that provide education in different types. A total of 346 students voluntarily participated in the study and provided data. The data for the study was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and analyzed through content analysis.

**Results:** The results of the study revealed that the majority of high school students belonging to Generation Z held positive perceptions of the nursing profession. They described nursing as an emotion, a family member, a guide, a source of trust, a helper for patients, a life saver, a healer, indispensable, hardworking, problem-solving, complementary, protective, and a source of nourishment. The students mainly likened nursing to a mother, medicine, a friend in tough times, family, water, an angel, a hero, and a beacon of light. A small portion of the students perceived nursing negatively, describing it as useless, worthless, and the doctor's assistant. They also likened nursing to a superhero's assistant, a right-hand man, a horse, a slave, and a laborer.

**Conclusions:** The positive perceptions of nursing among high school students belonging to Generation Z are encouraging. It is necessary to reinforce these positive perceptions and change negative perceptions in a positive direction.

**Keywords:** High school student, metaphor, nursing, profession perception

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Araştırma lise son sınıf öğrencilerinin hemşirelik mesleğine ilişkin metafor algılarını belirlemek amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir.

**Yöntem:** Araştırma farklı türde eğitim veren 8 lisede eğitim gören lise son sınıf öğrencilerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmaya gönüllü olan ve veri alınabilen 346 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırma verileri yarı yapılandırılmış bir soru formu ile toplanmış olup içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Araştırma sonucunda Z kuşağında yer alan lise öğrencilerinin büyük çoğunluğunun hemşirelik mesleğine yönelik algılarının olumlu olduğu, hemşirelik mesleğini daha çok bir duygu, aile üyesi, yol gösterici, güven kaynağı, hastalara yardım edici, hayat kurtarıcı, iyileştirici, vazgeçilmez, çalışkan, sorun çözücü, tamamlayıcı, koruyucu ve gıda olarak nitelendirdikleri ve mesleği en fazla anneye, ilaca, kötü gün dostuna, aileye, suya, meleğe sığınağa, kahramana ve fenere benzettikleri belirlenmiştir. Öğrencilerin çok az bir kısmının hemşirelik mesleğini olumsuz olarak algıladığı, mesleği daha çok faydasız, değersiz ve doktorun yardımcısı olarak nitelendirdikleri ve mesleği süper kahraman yardımcısı, sağ kol, at, köle ve ameleye benzettikleri ortaya çıkmıştır.

**Sonuç:** Araştırma sonuçlarına göre Z kuşağı lise öğrencilerinin hemşirelik mesleğine yönelik algılarının olumlu olması sevindiricidir. Bu olumlu algıları pekiştirilmeli ve olumsuz algıları olumlu yönde değiştirilmelidir

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hemşirelik, lise öğrencileri, meslek algısı, metafor

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## Introduction

The way in which society perceives and positions the professions that are necessary for individuals to sustain their vital activities and ensure the continuity of social life is crucial for both professional and societal development. Perceptions of professions can be a guiding factor in individuals' decisions to pursue a particular occupation in the future. Moreover, the way in which society views and values certain professions is also determinant in establishing social status (Karadağ and Kaya, 2020). Throughout history, professions that directly affect human life have been accorded significant importance in society, and those who practice these professions are often regarded as more important and valuable. One of these professions, nursing, has been attributed with great importance by society throughout history, as it directly affects human life, and those who practice it are seen as more important and valuable.

Efforts aimed at developing positive meanings, understandings, and perceptions towards a profession enable individuals to choose the profession willingly and with knowledge, and also provide the opportunity to train more motivated, conscious students during nursing education. Graduates from such education programs can also be encouraged to perform their profession more willingly, confidently, and with passion. This situation can positively impact the outputs of nurses working in healthcare, such as job satisfaction, professional commitment and so on.

In the literature, it can be seen that perceptions of the nursing profession are mostly examined within the scope of nursing students' perceptions of the profession (Güven and Ünsal, 2020; Köktürk Dalcalı and Kaya, 2020; Şimşek and Alpar, 2019), perceptions of society regarding the concept of nurse (Işık et al., 2023), nursing students' professional image (Çakıcı, 2021; Taşkıran et al., 2020), and nurses' own perceptions of their profession (Durgun et al., 2022; Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Şimşek and Alpar, 2019). However, it is observed that there are very few studies on high school students' perceptions of the nursing profession (Degazon et al., 2015; Eskimez et al., 2008; Güven, 2019; Jan and Sikander, 2012). Moreover, it has been determined that these studies only provide findings related to the direction of the perception (positive or negative) and there is no research result on how they perceive the nursing profession or what they compare it to.

Especially in understanding society's perceptions of the nursing profession that is, what they liken it to, metaphors are accepted as an important, facilitating, valid and widely tool used (Özveren, et al., 2018). Metaphors (mental images) are tools used to understand how individuals perceive and interpret events, objects, and especially abstract concepts through different analogies, and they mostly convey figurative meaning (Güven and Güven, 2009) and allow for the expression of ideas with fewer words and in a more emphasized way. At the same time have the potential to influence individuals' future actions (Karadağ and Kaya, 2020).

Studies that examine perceptions of the nursing profession within the framework of metaphors are mainly focused on nurses (Durgun et al., 2022; Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Saldamlı and Işık Andsoy, 2021), physicians and nurses (Karadağ and Kaya, 2020), nursing students (Köktürk Dalcalı and Kaya, 2020; Özveren et al., 2018; Şahin, 2019), patients (van Dusseldorp et al., 2019) and society (Işık et al., 2023). No study has been found regarding high school students' perceptions of a metaphor regarding the nursing profession.

In this context, it is necessary to conduct studies on the feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and perspectives of high school students, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, regarding the nursing profession considering the changing conditions both professionally and socially. This is because the final year high school students are preparing for university exams and are at the stage of shaping their future careers and will also form an important input for schools that provide nursing education in the near future. Their perceptions of the nursing profession will be effective in their decision to choose this profession or not. At the same time, it will also affect the willingness of those who choose the profession to do it willingly, both during and after graduation. Those who willingly choose and carry out the nursing profession in the future will affect the professional profile and qualifications, which will also affect the development of the profession and the way the profession is perceived positively by other segments of society.

As a result of the study, the perceptions and reasons behind the attitudes towards the nursing profession of high school seniors belonging to the Z generation will be revealed through the analysis of the metaphors they use. The study will identify problems related to the attitudes towards the profession and provide insight into the likelihood of

choosing nursing undergraduate programs. Additionally, the study results, which are believed to provide important data for generating solutions to problems related to the attitudes towards the profession, could contribute to converting negative images of the profession to positive ones and creating a more positive societal perception of the profession by promoting nursing as a career through initiatives such as career days. The study was conducted with the aim of identifying the metaphorical perceptions of high school seniors about the nursing profession in line with these needs and predictions.

## Methods

### Design

The research used a phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Phenomenology is a qualitative research model that allows revealing phenomena that are known but cannot be fully defined and require in-depth research (Patton, 2002; Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2011).

### Participants

The population of the study consisted of senior high school students who were studying in 23 different types of schools (such as science high schools, vocational high schools, etc.) located in the district center where the study was conducted, and who were studying in the 2022-2023 academic year and preparing for university entrance exams. To ensure sample diversity and representation of each type of school in the sample, a total of 8 schools, two from each school group, were randomly selected using a simple random sampling method. All senior high school students (N: 418) who were enrolled and accessible in these selected schools and who agreed to participate in the study were included. However, complete data was obtained from only 346 students. The study was conducted using a qualitative design.

### Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire created by the researchers was used to collect research data. This questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions aimed at identifying students' gender and type of school characteristics. The second part contained questions aimed at revealing students' metaphorical perceptions of the nursing profession. In this section, the definition of metaphor was provided along with examples, and students were asked, "If you were to compare nurses to an image, what would you compare them to?"

They were then asked to complete the sentence, "Nursing is like.... because...."

### Data Collection

The research data was collected between September and November 2022. During the data collection phase, the schools included in the study were visited, and the school administrators were informed about the research. Afterwards, at a suitable time, the researchers visited the classrooms and provided face-to-face explanations to the students about the research and the subject. Students who volunteered to participate in the research were asked to complete the questionnaire form.

### Data Analysis

The questionnaires collected from the students were reviewed and checked individually by the researchers, and those with incomplete answers were excluded from the analysis. The data were analyzed using percentage and frequency distribution, as well as content analysis (Erdoğan, 2014). Content analysis is a systematic and repeatable technique in which some words in a text are summarized into smaller content categories based on certain rules. Through the coding performed in this technique, the underlying concepts of the data and the relationships between these concepts are attempted to be explained (Erdoğan, 2014). In the study, attention was paid not only to the specified metaphor but also to its reasoning while categorizing the data. This is because the same metaphor produced by different people can sometimes be used in different meanings. Therefore, content analysis was conducted by taking into account the reasoning behind the generated metaphor.

In the analysis stage, firstly, metaphors were listed in alphabetical order, and metaphors with common features and related to each other were grouped under specific concepts. These concepts were categorized by examining the justifications for the metaphors. At this stage, 187 metaphors were grouped into 18 subcategories under 2 main categories, which were thought to cover them best. Then, some responses produced by the students for the nursing profession were identified as noteworthy and providing evidence for the relevant finding, and these were selected to be presented in the findings section.

### Ethical Principles

The research was approved by the ethical committee of the institution where the research was conducted (Date: 07.02.2022, No: 2022/11) and received official permission from the district

national education directorate regarding its ethical suitability. Additionally, necessary explanations regarding the research were provided to the students, and data were obtained from volunteers who were informed and consented based on a voluntary consent form. For students under the age of 18, consent was obtained from their parents, while for students over 18, consent was obtained based on their own consent.

### Results

It was determined that 56% of the high school senior students who participated in the study were female (n: 194), while 44% were male students (n: 152). It was also determined that the majority of the students were educated in Anatolian High Schools (n:213; % 61.6)

When the findings regarding the students' metaphor perceptions were evaluated, it was observed that they formed a total of 187 metaphors under 2 main categories (positive and negative) and 18 subcategories (13 positive, 5 negative). The main categories and subcategories are presented in Figure 1.

**Table 1.** Distribution of findings regarding participants' characteristics

Characteristics	n	%	
<b>Gender</b>	Female	194	56
	Male	152	44
<b>Type of school</b>	Anatolian High School ( AHS)	213	61.6
	Science High School (SHS)	63	18.2
	Anatolian Imam Hatip High School ( AIHHS)	59	17.0
	Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School ( VTAHS)	11	3.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>100</b>

When analyzing the metaphors that students created for the nursing profession, it was found that the first category perceived was positive metaphors. In this main category, it was determined that 88% of the students (n=303) used 158 different metaphors in a positive way, and these metaphors were grouped into 13 subcategories. The subcategories created by positive metaphors used for the nursing profession were named emotion, family member, guide, source of trust, helper to patients, life saver, healer, indispensable, hardworking, problem solver, complementary, protective, and food. The most

commonly used positive metaphors were identified as mother (n:38), medicine (n:12), friend in hard times (n:8), family (n:8), home (n:7), water (n:7), angel (n:6), refuge (n:5), tree (n:5), hero (n:4), lantern (n:4), and book (n:4) (Figure 1).

Some responses providing evidence for this finding are given as examples below.

"Nursing is like a mother because when you need them, nurses do everything they can like a mother to make you feel better."(AHS-64)

"Nursing is like a mother because mothers want their children to be well."(AHS-126)

"Nursing is like a mother because they heal wounds with maternal tenderness." ."(AHS-137)

"Nursing is like a mother because just as a mother tries to be with her baby at all times, nurses try to help their patients." (AIHHS-24)

"Nursing is like a mother because they protect and love us like a mother protecting her baby, and they come to our aid when we are in trouble." ( AIHHS-45)

"Nursing is like a family because even though there is no blood relationship, they care for us like a family when we are sick." ( AIHHS-7)

"Nursing is like a family because they know how to be there for us in hard times." ( AHS-198)

"Nursing is like medicine because they are people who heal all wounds." ( AHS-62)

"Nursing is like medicine because they help us recover faster and heal patients." (AHS-151)

"Nursing is like medicine because when you need them, you go to nurses like you do to medicine." (AHS-89)

"Nursing is like a friend in hard times because they can tell the truth but sometimes say harsh things." (AHS-173)

"Nursing is like a friend in hard times because they are the first to be with us when we need them." (AHS-124)

"Nursing is like home because home is where you feel safe, and nurses are the people you trust when you are sick." (AHS-158)

"Nursing is like home because it is a roof that protects everyone from all kinds of disasters." (AHS-139)

"Nursing is like water because it is necessary to sustain life, and when we need it, it is the first thing that comes to mind." (AIHHS-58)

"Nursing is like water because it can save our lives at our most desperate moments." (AIHHS-42)

"Nursing is like an angel because they are people in white who are right beside us when we need help,



Figure 1. Positive metaphors and examples generated by students towards the nursing profession

and they can save lives with even the slightest attention." (SHS-45)

"Nursing is like a refuge because it is a refuge that one can take refuge in when they are sick." (VTAHS-6)

"Nursing is like a refuge because it is a safe place where one can find shelter in difficult times." (AHS-88)

"Nursing is like a tree, because even in our most desperate moments, we can take refuge in their shadows." (AIHHS-23)

"Nursing is like a hero, because during difficult times, nurses do everything they can for patients, and emerge in challenging situations to restore people's health." (AHS-212)

"Nursing is like a lighthouse. It helps patients find their way when they need help." (AIHHS-8)

"Nursing is like a book. The more you read, the more knowledgeable you become, and it guides us." (AHS-152)

When the negative metaphors developed by the students towards the nursing profession were examined, it was determined that 43 students used 29 different metaphors grouped under 5 subcategories. The subcategories created for nursing as negatively perceived were classified as useless, worthless, difficult, harmful, and doctor's assistant (Figure 2). The most frequently used negative metaphors were identified as superhero assistant (n:6), right hand (n:4), horse (n:3), slave (n:2), and laborer (n:2). Some responses that provide evidence for this finding are given as examples below.

"Nursing is like a superhero's assistant, because they help the doctor, who is like Superman." (AHS-205)

"Nursing is like a superhero's assistant, because they do what the doctors say, but they are not as visible as they are, yet they take care of everyone." (AHS-174)



**Figure 2.** Negative metaphors and examples produced by students regarding the nursing profession

"Nursing is like a right-hand, because they are the doctor's right-hand." (AHS-68)

"Nursing is like a right-hand, because it is a profession that serves as the doctor's right-hand during the first aid, and they run to do whatever the doctor needs." (AHS-59)

"Nursing is like a horse, because they carry the burden of the doctors." (SHS-30)

"Nursing is like a slave, because they do the legwork and are not valued as much as the doctors." (AHS-170)

"Nursing is like a laborer, because they run from here to there and get paid less." (AHS-196)

### Discussion

The public image of the nursing profession has a significant impact on both the profession's attractiveness to potential students and the level of

professionalism within the field. Therefore, it is strongly emphasized that studies examining how the nursing profession is perceived be conducted using different methods, at different times, and with different sample groups. In line with this, this study evaluates the perception of the nursing profession among high school students using metaphors as a different method. The results reveal that 88% of the participating students used positive metaphors, indicating a positive perception of the nursing profession. The students described nursing as an emotion, a family member, a guide, a source of trust, a helper to patients, a life saver, a healer, indispensable, hardworking, a problem solver, complementary, protective, and nourishing. The students compared nursing most commonly to a mother, medicine, a friend in difficult times, family, home, water, an angel, a refuge, a tree, a hero, a lighthouse, and a book.

It is considered a promising situation that the majority of students belonging to Generation Z have a positive perception of the nursing profession in terms of its potential for future career choices. It is believed that the visibility and appreciation of nurses' outstanding efforts and performance by the community during the pandemic process have had a significant impact on the profession's importance being recognized more. Similarly, in a study conducted with university students, it was revealed that the experience of having Covid-19 positively affected the image of the nursing profession (Engin et al., 2022), while in the pre-pandemic period, it was determined that non-health-related university students (Ak et al., 2021) and nursing students (Karaman et al., 2020; Sümen et al., 2022) had a moderately positive perception of the nursing profession image. Another study conducted before the pandemic revealed that the majority of fourth-year nursing students had positive metaphor perceptions, and the primary metaphors they used were similar to those in this study, namely, mother, angel, medicine, and robot (Suzan et al., 2021). Similarly, in another metaphor study conducted with nursing students, it was reported that students most commonly described the concept of nursing using metaphors such as mother, water, angel, sun, tree, superman, and ant/bee, and their perceptions of nursing were generally positive (Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021).

Furthermore, in another study conducted after the pandemic, it was found that first-year nursing students at the beginning of their profession had a positive perception of the nursing profession, and they described nursing as a rewarding and pridelful profession due to their ability to help and heal patients (Bozkul et al., 2022). It was also noted that they had an interest in the nursing profession from an early age (Şahin, 2019), which supports the findings of this study.

Studies conducted on high school students have shown similar results to this study. Senior high school students were found to have a positive attitude towards the nursing profession (Güven, 2019) and a positive perception of the career image of nursing (Jan and Sikander, 2012). They also perceived nursing as an ideal profession due to its caring and nurturing nature (Degazon et al., 2015; Eskimez et al., 2008).

These findings demonstrate that the nursing profession is perceived as a trustworthy and significant occupation, deriving its strength from its role in providing care and promoting healing.

Moreover, they suggest that in order to enhance its professional power, the nursing profession needs to further develop its care-giving role.

In the study, a small percentage of high school students who participated in the research (12%, n:43) were found to have negative perceptions of the nursing profession. They classified their negative perceptions using metaphors such as useless, worthless, difficult, harmful, and as the doctor's assistant. The most commonly used negative metaphors were superhero sidekick, right hand, horse, slave, and laborer. These findings indicate that students view the nursing profession as an assistant profession rather than a professional one.

In previous studies, it has been reported that some first-year nursing students perceive nurses as doctor's assistants (Bozkul et al., 2022) and nursing students have lower perceptions about nursing compared to students in nutrition and dietetics, physiotherapy, and healthcare management programs (Çelik and Soyer Er, 2022). Additionally, a study conducted on university students revealed that although students perceive nursing as an ideal profession in terms of providing care, they have negative perceptions regarding aspects such as empowerment, decision-making, high degree/status attainment, high income, and leadership (Dağhan et al., 2016).

In some studies, conducted with high school students, similar results were obtained, where senior female high school students did not prefer the nursing profession (Eskimez et al., 2008). In a study conducted with high school students in two different countries, it was observed that students in both countries did not perceive nursing as an ideal profession and perceived nurses as individuals with limited opportunities for leadership and autonomy who earn little money (Degazon et al., 2015).

In a study conducted with middle school students, the findings support that students do not perceive the nursing profession as an ideal career, and the most negative perception is related to the low wages and limited participation in decision-making by nurses (Cohen, 2004). Another study indicated that young people evaluated the social status of the nursing profession at a low level (Glerean et al., 2017).

These findings suggest the need for nurses to exhibit their professional roles more strongly, increase their autonomy, and implement a better salary policy to reduce the perception of nursing as an "assistant profession".

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study results reveal that the majority of high school students from Generation Z have positive perceptions towards the nursing profession, considering it as an emotion, a family member, a guide, a source of trust, a helper for patients, a life-saver, a healer, an indispensable occupation, hardworking, problem-solving, complementary, protective, and even food. The students likened the nursing profession to a mother, medicine, a friend in bad times, a family member, water, an angel, a refuge, a hero, and a light. Only a small minority of students perceived the nursing profession negatively, considering it more useless, worthless, and merely an assistant to doctors, and likening it to a superhero's assistant, a right-hand person, a horse, a slave, and a laborer.

According to the research findings, it is necessary to reinforce the positive perceptions and change the negative ones towards the nursing profession among high school students belonging to the Z generation. To achieve this, vocational introduction days can be organized in high schools to provide information about the profession, and interactions with successful and role-model members of the profession can be established. Additionally, engaging students in activities that encourage them to pursue a career in nursing can also be recommended. Moreover, conducting similar studies with high school students from different regions to evaluate their perceptions towards the profession is suggested.

### Limitations

The research findings are limited to the statements of the voluntarily participating students in the final year of high schools operating only in the district center and included in the research scope. The fact that the students were in the process of preparing for university entrance exams and were stressed has led to limitations in their participation in the research. Additionally, the limited number of studies on the subject has also caused another limitation in the discussion of the research findings.

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**Ethics Committee Approval:** The study was approved by the Health Sciences Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University (Date: 07.02.2022, approval number: 2022/11)

**Author Contributions:** Idea/concept: SA, Mİ; Design:SA,Mİ; Consulting: SA; Data collection and/or Data Processing: Mİ,ŞNG,ŞT; Analysis and/or Comment: SA; Source browsing;SA, Mİ,ŞNG,ŞT ; Writing of the Article: SA; Critical review: SA

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### What did the study add to the literature?

- This study, unlike other studies, reveals the perceptions of Generation Z high school seniors who are in the process of choosing a profession, are future job candidates, and will constitute an important input for nursing schools in the near future, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era. The study sheds light on their perceptions of the nursing profession.
- The present study is a qualitative study based on metaphors and reveals that a vast majority of Z generation nursing students have positive perceptions towards the nursing profession.

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