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## Nursing and Midwifery Students' Attitudes Towards Women with Disabilities in Health Care

### *Hemşirelik ve Ebelik Öğrencilerinin Sağlık Bakımında Engelli Kadınlara Karşı Tutumları*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students towards disabled women and disabled people in health care.

**Methods:** The sample of this descriptive and cross-sectional study consisted of 435 students, 273 from nursing and 162 from midwifery departments, who studied at a university in Central Anatolia between March 1, 2024 and June 1, 2024. The data were collected using a "Sociodemographic Data Collection Form", "Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities" and "Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale" via face-to-face interview technique.

**Results:** It was determined that 86.2% of the students participating in the study were female, 62.8% were studying in the department of nursing, 5.3% had a disabled person in their first-degree relatives and 32.0% had a disabled person in their distant relatives, 37.7% cared for a disabled patient in their clinical internships, and 72.2% wanted to receive education in their undergraduate studies towards the disabled. The mean scores of the total (57.70±9.94) and sub-dimensions of the Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities and the mean scores of the total (54.95±7.91) and sub-dimensions of the Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale were above the middle level. It was determined that the mean total scores of the Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities and Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale of the female students participating in the study and those studying in the second grade, and the mean total score of the Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale of those who wanted to receive education for the disabled were high and statistically significant (p<0.05).

**Conclusion:** It was concluded that the students had positive attitudes above the medium level both in terms of disabled women and disabled patients. To better understand the health care needs and challenges faced by women with disabilities, it is recommended to highlight the importance of this issue in both the theoretical education and clinical practice of midwifery and nursing students.

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu çalışma, hemşirelik ve ebelik bölümü öğrencilerinin engelli kadınlara ve sağlık bakımında engellilere yönelik tutumlarını belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Yöntem:** Bu tanımlayıcı ve kesitsel türdeki çalışmanın örneklemini, 1 Mart 2024 - 1 Haziran 2024 tarihleri arasında, İç Anadolu bölgesinde yer alan bir üniversitede öğrenim gören 273'ü hemşirelik ve 162'si ebelik bölümünden olmak üzere toplam 435 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Veriler, "Sosyodemografik Veri Toplama Formu", "Engelli Kadın Tutum Ölçeği" ve "Sağlık Bakımında Engelli Tutumları Ölçeği" kullanılarak yüz yüze görüşme tekniği ile toplanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Araştırmaya katılan öğrencilerin, %86.2'sinin kadın olduğu, %62.8'inin hemşirelik bölümünde okuduğu, %5.3'ünün birinci derece yakınında ve %32.0'mın uzak akrabasında engelli birey olduğu, %37.7'sinin klinik stajlarında engelli bir hastaya bakım verdiği, %72.2'sinin lisans eğitimleri sırasında engellilere yönelik eğitim almak istediği belirlendi. Öğrencilerin Engelli Kadın Tutum Ölçeği toplam (57.70±9.94) ve alt boyutları puan ortalamaları ile Sağlık Bakımında Engelli Tutumları Ölçeği toplam (54.95±7.91) ve alt boyutları puan ortalamaları orta düzeyin üzerinde bulundu. Araştırmaya katılan kız öğrencilerin ve ikinci sınıfta okuyanların Engelli Kadın Tutum Ölçeği ve Sağlık Bakımında Engelli Tutumları Ölçeği toplam puan ortalamaları, engellilere yönelik eğitim almak isteyenlerin Sağlık Bakımında Engelli Tutumları Ölçeği toplam puan ortalamalarının yüksek ve istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olduğu belirlendi (p<0.05).

**Sonuç:** Araştırmaya katılan öğrencilerin hem engelli kadınlar açısından hem de engelli hastalar açısından orta düzeyin üzerinde olumlu tutuma sahip oldukları belirlenmiştir. Sağlık bakımında engelli kadınların ihtiyaçlarının ve karşılaştıkları zorlukların daha iyi anlaşılması için ebelik ve hemşirelik öğrencilerine hem teorik eğitimde hem de klinik uygulamalarda konunun öneminin vurgulanması önerilmektedir.

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## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as "a person's inability to meet the demands of normal life due to the absence or impairment of an organ, resulting in a significant and continuous loss of function and the manifestation of physical, mental, or emotional characteristics" (WHO, 2011). Disability, whether congenital or acquired, represents a multidimensional diversity characterized by the loss of physical or mental abilities such as vision, hearing, speech, or mobility (Cirban Ekrem, Demirel Bozkurt, Daşkan, 2023). An estimated 15% of the world's adult population lives with a disability, with 80% of these individuals residing in developing countries (WHO, 2023; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability [UNDESAD], 2013). In Türkiye, 7.9% of the disabled in the general population are women and 5.9% are men (T.C. Aile Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı Engelli ve Yaşlı Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2023).

The life experiences and health needs of people with disabilities are affected by their gender, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity and economic status. Individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to experience chronic diseases, strokes, obesity, and poor oral health. A key contributing factor is that their access to healthcare services is 15 times more difficult compared to non-disabled individuals. Additionally, stigmatization, discrimination, poverty, and exclusion from education and employment further hinder their access to healthcare. Consequently, their overall health deteriorates, functionality decreases, they face greater limitations, and the risk of premature death increases significantly (WHO, 2023). Being a woman, in addition to having a disability, can place individuals in a doubly disadvantaged position within society. Women with disabilities often face discrimination, stigmatization, neglect, as well as abuse and violence, particularly when accessing services related to family processes, education, healthcare, social life, and employment (UNDESAD, 2013; Mueller and Sutherland, 2023; Meyer, Lasater, Lee and Moreno, 2020). As a result of these challenges, many women with disabilities are forced to restrict their living space to the home, limiting their participation in society (Cirban Ekrem et al., 2023; Orhan and Özkan, 2020; Koutsogeorgou, 2020). On the other hand, women with disabilities often face barriers in exercising their sexual and reproductive rights and lack autonomy over decisions related to their own bodies (Cirban Ekrem et al., 2023; Rade et al., 2023).

Nurses, who provide care to women with disabilities in various settings such as hospitals, schools, and workplaces, play a crucial role in their physical, mental, and social empowerment (Wood and Marshall, 2010). Midwives provide care to women with disabilities, particularly during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, and offer guidance to help them overcome the challenges they face (Kapan and Boyacıoğlu, 2019). Although some studies have evaluated attitudes toward women with disabilities (Punduk Yılmaz and Ören, 2021), there appears to be a lack of research examining the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students toward individuals with disabilities in healthcare settings, particularly regarding women with disabilities. Existing literature indicates that healthcare professionals (Şimşek, Çavdar, Temiz, Gündüz and Yılmaz Yalçınkaya, 2020) and nursing students (Sehga et al., 2022; Atia, Ibrahim, Mohamed, 2022; Roca-Hurtuna and Sanz-Ponce, 2023) generally exhibit positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. However, these attitudes are influenced by personal factors such as gender, academic department, class level, interpersonal relationships, and work experience (Aşık et al., 2021). While previous interactions with individuals with disabilities (Roca-Hurtuna and Sanz-Ponce, 2023) tend to promote positive attitudes, a lack of confidence in providing care can result in negative attitudes and behaviors (Sarantaki, Zambeli, Diamanti and Lykeridou, 2021).

It is crucial to assess the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students-who will serve as role models for society as professional healthcare providers upon graduation-toward women with disabilities in healthcare contexts. This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students towards disabled women and disabled people in health care. To address this purpose, responses to the following research questions were sought:

- What are the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students toward women with disabilities?
- What are the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students toward individuals with disabilities in healthcare settings?
- Is there a difference between the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing and midwifery students and their attitudes toward women with disabilities?
- Is there a difference between the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing and midwifery students and their attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in healthcare settings?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study is a descriptive and cross-sectional investigation.

## Population and Sample

The study population comprised 733 students (471 nursing students and 262 midwifery students) enrolled in the first through fourth years of the nursing and midwifery programs at the Faculty of Health Sciences of a state university in the Central Anatolia Region. The aim was to include all students who were literate in Turkish and volunteered to participate in the research, without sampling. Data were collected from March 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024, with a final sample of 435 (%59,3) students. Post hoc analysis conducted using the GPower 3.1 program indicated an effect size of 0.50 with 99% power and a 0.05 margin of error for the current sample size (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang and Buchner, 2007).

## Data Collection

Data for the study were collected from students who volunteered to participate after being provided with detailed information about the study during classroom sessions outside of regular class hours. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. Data collection forms were administered to students using a face-to-face interview technique, and the students completed the forms in approximately 15 minutes.

## Data Collection Tools

### Socio-demographic Form

This form, developed by the researchers based on the literature (Aşık et al., 2021; Şimşek et al., 2020; Apaydın and Barış, 2021, Wang et al., 2021), includes a total of 22 questions covering sociodemographic and disability-related characteristics of the students.

### Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities (ADWS)

This scale was developed by Punduk Yılmaz and Oren in 2021. ADWS is a likert-type scale consisting of 17 items and four sub-dimensions. The sub-dimensions are “disabled women and their private life”, “disabled women and disadvantage”, “disabled women and social support” and “disabled women and gender”. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 17 points and the highest score is 85 points. A low score on the scale indicates high levels of negativity, while a high score indicates low levels of negativity for women with disabilities. The scale’s internal reliability coefficient was found as 0.87 (Punduk Yılmaz and Ören, 2021). The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the current study was found to be 0.79.

### Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale (DAHC)

The Turkish validity and reliability of the scale, developed by Chadd and Pangilinan (2011), was established by Sahin and Gedik (2020). DAHC is a likert-type scale consisting of 15 items and two sub-dimensions. The sub-dimensions are “burden” and “inclusion”. The scale uses a five-point likert scale across its 15 items and two sub-dimensions, with a potential score ranging from 15 to 75. An increase in the total score on the scale indicates more positive attitudes towards patients with disabilities. Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was found between 0.17 and 0.85 (Sahin and Gedik, 2020). Cronbach alpha reliability of the current study was found to be 0.81.

## Data Analysis

Statistical analysis of the study data was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to assess the normality of numerical variables. For variables that exhibited a normal distribution, descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation, were calculated. For comparisons between two independent groups with normally distributed data, an Independent Samples t-test was used. For comparisons involving three or more independent groups with normally distributed data, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed. “The Independent Samples t-test” was used to compare two independent groups with normally distributed data, and “One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)” was used to compare three or more independent groups. The relationship between independent and dependent variables and the correlation between the scale scores was examined using Pearson correlation. In this study, statistical significance cutoff point was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ .

## Ethical Consideration

Before commencing the study, approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee in the province where the research was conducted (date:29.02.2024; approval number: 2024/04-08), and verbal consent was granted by the faculty where the study would take place. Permissions to use the scales included in the study were obtained via email from the responsible authors. Additionally, both verbal and written informed consent were secured from all student participants. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

## RESULTS

It was found that 86.2% of the students participating in the study were female. Among them, 62.8% were enrolled in the nursing department, and 28.0% were first-year students. Additionally, 64.8% of the students reported living in a metropolitan area, 64.6% perceived their income as modarete, and 89.4% came from nuclear families. Regarding parental education, 50.3% of the students' mothers and 30.6% of their fathers were primary school graduates (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of the students (n=435)

Characteristics	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	Min-Max.	n	%
<b>Age</b>	20.60±1.62	18-26		
<b>Gender</b>				
Female			375	86.2
Male			60	13.8
<b>Department</b>				
Midwifery			162	37.2
Nursing			273	62.8
<b>Class</b>				
First-year			122	28.0
Second-year			103	23.7
Third-year			107	24.6
Forth-year			103	23.7
<b>Place of residence</b>				
Metropolitan area			282	64.8
District			109	25.1
Town/village			44	10.1
<b>Perceived economic status</b>				
Low			115	26.4
Modarete			281	64.6
High			39	9.0
<b>Family type</b>				
Nuclear family			389	89.4
Extended family			46	10.6
<b>Mother's educational status</b>				
Primary school			219	50.3
Secondary school			85	19.5
High school			89	20.5
University			42	9.7
<b>Father's educational status</b>				
Primary school			133	30.6
Secondary school			95	21.8
High school			118	27.1
University			89	20.5
<b>Presence of chronic disease</b>				
Yes			3	0.7
No			432	99.3

n: Number, %:Percent,  $\bar{X}$ :Mean, SD: Standart Deviation, Min: Minimum Max: Maximum

It was observed that 5.3% of the students in the study had a first-degree relative with a disability, and 32.0% had a distant relative with a disability. Additionally, 37.7% of the students reported providing care to a disabled patient during their internship, 23.9% had received training on disabilities, 72.2% expressed a desire to receive training on

disability, and 89.2% exhibited a positive attitude towards individuals with disabilities (Table 2). The students were found to have above-average positive attitudes towards both disabled women and disabled patients (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Distribution of students' characteristics towards individuals with disabilities (n=435)

Characteristics	n	%
<b>First-degree relative with a disability</b>		
Yes	23	5.3
No	415	94.7
<b>Disability in a distant relative</b>		
Yes	139	32.0
No	296	68.0
<b>Caring for the disabled patient during internship</b>		
Yes	164	37.7
No	271	62.3
<b>Receiving training on disability</b>		
Yes	104	23.9
No	331	76.1
<b>Willingness to receive training on disability</b>		
Yes	314	72.2
No	121	27.8
<b>Attitudes towards individuals with disabilities</b>		
Positive attitude	388	89.2
Negative attitude	11	2.5
Undecided	36	8.3

ADWS=Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities, DAHC=Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale, n=Number, %=Percent, Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum

**Table 3.** Distribution of ADWS and DAHC scores of students (n=435)

Scales	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	Min.	Max.
<b>ADWS</b>	57.70±9.94	17.00	85.00
<b>Disabled women and their private life</b>	21.51±4.54	6.00	30.00
<b>Disabled women and disadvantage</b>	12.86±3.62	4.00	20.00
<b>Disabled women and social support</b>	13.87±2.71	4.00	20.00
<b>Disabled women and gender</b>	9.45±2.40	3.00	15.00
<b>DAHC</b>	54.95±7.91	32.00	75.00
<b>Burden</b>	30.78±6.05	9.00	45.00
<b>Inclusion</b>	24.17±3.90	6.00	30.00

ADWS=Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities, DAHC=Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale,  $\bar{X}$ =Mean, SD=Standard deviation, Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum

The distribution of the mean scores for ADWS and DAHC based on various sociodemographic characteristics of the students included in the study is presented in Table 4. A statistically significant difference was observed between the mean scores of students' departments and the mean scores of the sub-dimensions related to disabled women and social support in ADWS ( $p<0.05$ ). It was found that nursing students exhibited more positive attitudes towards the social support of disabled women. A statistically significant difference was found between the gender of the students and the mean scores for the ADWS sub-dimensions of disabled women and their private life, disabled women and social support, as well as the total ADWS score ( $p<0.05$ ). Accordingly, it was found that male students exhibited more negative attitudes towards disabled women's private lives, social support, and disabled women overall ( $p=0.013$ ;  $p=0.018$ ;  $p=0.010$ , respectively). A statistically significant difference was found between the total DAHC scores and the inclusion sub-dimension scores of the students based on gender ( $p<0.05$ ). Female students were found to have a more inclusive attitude towards disabled individuals, both in social and healthcare contexts, and exhibited more positive attitudes towards disabled patients ( $p=0.002$  and  $p=0.013$ , respectively). The mean score for the ADWS sub-dimension of disabled women and disadvantage ( $13.50\pm 3.70$ ), as well as the total ADWS score ( $59.20\pm 10.75$ ), were found to be higher among second-year students compared to those in other grades, with a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.009$  and  $p=0.027$ , respectively). It was found that the mean scores for the ADWS sub-dimensions of disabled women and social support ( $14.34\pm 2.81$ ) and disabled women and gender ( $9.90\pm 2.66$ ) were higher among first-year students compared to those in other grades, with a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.027$  and  $p=0.012$ , respectively). It was found that the mean score for the DAHC inclusion sub-dimension ( $24.84\pm 3.79$ ) was higher among first-year students compared to those in other grades, with a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.001$ ) (Table 4). There is a significant difference between the mean scores for the ADWS disabled women and social support sub-

dimension, the DAHC total score, and the sub-dimension scores based on students' willingness to receive disability education ( $p<0.05$ ). Students who indicated a willingness to receive disability education had higher mean scores in the disabled women and social support sub-dimension ( $14.04\pm2.66$ ), the DAHC total score ( $56.27\pm7.63$ ), and the burden ( $31.75\pm5.60$ ) and inclusion ( $24.53\pm3.92$ ) sub-dimensions, compared to those who were not willing to receive such training, with statistically significant differences observed ( $p=0.029$ ;  $p=0.001$ ;  $p=0.001$  and  $p=0.002$ , respectively) (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Distribution of ADWS and DAHC scores according to descriptive characteristics of students (n=435)

Characteristics	ADWS				DAHC			
	Disabled women and their private life	Disabled women and disadvantage	Disabled women and social support	Disabled women and gender	Total	Burden	Inclusion	Total
	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$	$\bar{X}\pm SD$
<b>Department</b>								
Nursing	21.52±4.79	12.80±3.81	13.62±2.90	9.44±2.43	57.37±10.66	30.66±6.38	24.07±4.13	54.73±8.12
Midwifery	21.50±4.10	12.96±3.27	14.29±2.30	9.48±2.35	58.22±8.59	30.99±5.45	24.33±3.50	55.32±7.56
Statistical Analysis	t=0.045 p=0.964	t=0.441 p=0.660	t=2.662 <b>p=0.004</b>	t=0.191 p=0.424	t=0.915 p=0.361	t=0.563 p=0.574	t=0.665 p=0.506	t=0.759 p=0.448
<b>Gender</b>								
Female	21.73±4.36	12.98±3.61	14.00±2.64	9.50±2.41	58.18±9.53	30.87±6.00	24.46±3.66	55.33±7.77
Male	20.17±5.37	12.13±3.60	13.10±3.04	9.22±2.33	54.61±11.82	30.25±6.39	22.33±4.83	52.58±8.49
Statistical Analysis	t=2.489 <b>p=0.013</b>	t=1.673 p=0.095	t=2.380 <b>p=0.018</b>	t=0.821 p=0.412	t=2.598 <b>p=0.010</b>	t=0.733 p=0.464	t=3.261 <b>p=0.002</b>	t=2.508 <b>p=0.013</b>
<b>Class</b>								
First-year	21.30±4.73	13.34±3.58	14.34±2.81	9.90±2.66	58.89±10.18	30.84±6.16	24.84±3.79	55.68±7.90
Second-year	21.90±4.61	13.50±3.70	14.13±2.89	9.68±2.65	59.20±10.75	31.15±7.12	24.15±3.96	55.29±8.31
Third-year	20.98±4.16	12.36±3.23	13.43±2.42	8.95±1.97	55.72±8.68	30.50±4.99	22.96±3.92	53.46±7.40
Forth-year	21.93±4.61	12.16±3.81 (2-4)	13.51±2.61 (1-3)	9.21±2.10 (1-3)	56.81±9.75 (2-3)	30.64±5.83	24.64±3.72 (1-3), (3-4)	55.28±7.96
Statistical Analysis	F=1.111 p=0.344	F=3.892 <b>p=0.009</b>	F=3.085 <b>p=0.027</b>	F=3.685 <b>p=0.012</b>	F=3.096 <b>p=0.027</b>	F=0.226 p=0.878	F=5.247 <b>p=0.001</b>	F=1.748 p=0.156
<b>Willingness to receive training on disability</b>								
Yes	21.65±4.60	13.00±3.59	14.04±2.66	9.47±2.36	58.16±9.94	31.75±5.60	24.53±3.92	56.27±7.63
No	21.13±4.37	12.50±3.67	13.41±2.79	9.42±2.51	56.46±9.87	28.28±6.45	23.22±3.72	51.50±7.62
Statistical Analysis	t=1.085 p=0.278	t=1.295 p=0.196	t=2.187 <b>p=0.029</b>	t=0.169 p=0.866	t=1.604 p=0.109	t=5.846 <b>p=0.001</b>	t=5.531 <b>p=0.001</b>	t=3.158 <b>p=0.002</b>

ADWS=Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities, DAHC=Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale,  $\bar{X}$ =Mean, SD= Standart Deviation, F= One-way analysis of variance, t= Independent sample t test, p=level of significance, Difference, Bonferroni test

The correlation analysis between the mean scores of the ADWS and DAHC scales in nursing students revealed a weak correlation between the mean total score of the DAHC scale and the inclusion sub-dimension, as well as between the mean total score of the ADWS scale and the sub-dimension scores for disabled women and their private life and disabled women and social support. Additionally, a very weak positive significant relationship was found between the burden sub-dimension of the DAHC scale and the total score of the ADWS scale, as well as the mean scores for the disabled women and their private life, disabled women and disadvantage, and disabled women and social support sub-dimensions ( $p<0.05$ ). Furthermore, a very weak positive significant correlation was observed between the total mean score of the DAHC scale and the inclusion sub-dimension, as well as the mean scores for the disabled women and disadvantage and disabled women and gender sub-dimensions ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 5).

The correlation analysis between the mean scores of the ADWS and DAHC scales in midwifery students revealed a weak correlation between the total mean score of the DAHC scale and the burden and inclusion sub-dimensions, and the total mean score of the ADWS scale, as well as the disabled women and disadvantage and disabled women and social support sub-dimensions. A very weak correlation was found between the mean score of the burden sub-dimension and the mean score of the disabled women and gender sub-dimension. Additionally, a significant positive correlation at a weak level was observed between the total mean score of the DAHC scale and the mean score of the burden sub-dimension, as well as between the mean score of the disabled women and their private life sub-dimension. A significant positive correlation was also found at a very weak level between the mean score of the inclusion sub-dimension and the mean score of the disabled women and their private life sub-dimension ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 5).

**Table 5.** The correlation between the mean scores of ADWS and DAHC of according to study field of students (Nursing n=273; Midwifery n=162)

Variable		ADWS									
		Disabled women and their private life		Disabled women and disadvantage		Disabled women and social support		Disabled women and gender		Total	
		Nursing	Midwifery	Nursing	Midwifery	Nursing	Midwifery	Nursing	Midwifery	Nursing	Midwifery
DAHC	Burden	r=0.215 p=0.001	r=0.292 p=0.001	r=0.146 p=0.001	r=0.364 p=0.001	r=0.206 p=0.001	r=0.470 p=0.001	r=0.098 p=0.107	r=0.178 p=0.024	r=0.227 p=0.001	r=0.452 p=0.001
	Inclusion	r=0.282 p=0.001	r=0.236 p=0.002	r=0.218 p=0.001	r=0.330 p=0.001	r=0.325 p=0.001	r=0.441 p=0.001	r=0.175 p=0.004	r=0.152 p=0.054	r=0.333 p=0.001	r=0.398 p=0.001
	Total	r=0.312 p=0.001	r=0.262 p=0.001	r=0.225 p=0.001	r=0.273 p=0.001	r=0.328 p=0.001	r=0.329 p=0.001	r=0.166 p=0.006	r=0.147 p=0.062	r=0.348 p=0.001	r=0.357 p=0.001

ADWS=Attitude Scale for Women with Disabilities, DAHC=Disability Attitudes in Health Care Scale, \*Pearson correlation; significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$

## DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to assess the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students toward women with disabilities and individuals with disabilities in healthcare settings. The statistical analysis revealed that both midwifery and nursing students held positive attitudes above the mean level regarding disabled women and disabled patients. While there are no studies in the literature specifically examining the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students towards women with disabilities, there are existing studies that explore the attitudes of health professionals towards women with disabilities (Devkota, Murray, Kett and Groce, 2017; Devkota, Kett and Groce, 2019; Morrison et al., 2014; WHO, 2015). Our study result is consistent with the existing literature. This consistency is likely attributable to the emphasis on individualized care in nursing education and the importance placed on patient participation for effective care and treatment (Toru, 2020). Undergraduate students' attitudes towards disabled women and disabled individuals in healthcare are influenced by various factors. Our study identified several key factors affecting these attitudes, including the students' gender, their year of study, and their willingness to receive education on disabilities. Additionally, our study found that male students held more negative attitudes towards disabled women, their private lives, and their social support compared to female students. In the literature, there are studies that examine societal attitudes towards women with disabilities (Devkota et al., 2017; Devkota et al., 2019; Hasson-Ohayon, Hason-Shaked, Silberg, Shpigelman and Roe, 2018). However, no studies were found that specifically examine male attitudes towards disabled women. Consistent with our findings, Aşık et al. (2021) reported that female students had more positive attitudes towards disabled individuals compared to male students. Similarly, Şahin and Akyol (2010) found that female students exhibited more favorable attitudes towards disabled people. Our study's results align with existing literature. It is believed that the more negative attitudes of male students towards disabled women may stem from societal perceptions of disability as a deficiency (Çılğın, 2023). Male students, influenced by these societal views, may approach disabled women from a gendered perspective.

Our study found that third-year students had more negative attitudes towards women with disabilities compared to students in other grades. Although we did not find any studies in the literature applying the ADWS used in our study to nursing or midwifery students, there are studies that have examined nursing students' attitudes towards disabled individuals (Aşık et al., 2021; Gedik and Toker, 2018). Stachura and Garven (2003) and Aşık et al. (2021) found that attitudes towards the disabled became more positive with higher levels of education. Empathy is a core professional behavior in health education. This behavior is shaped by several factors, including the empathy training course, the student's character, the patient's profile, and the surrounding environmental conditions (Sathaporn and Pitanupong, 2022). The absence of similar results in our study may be attributed to the fact that the third-year students in our sample were primarily engaged in learning and interacting with theoretical knowledge, had not yet encountered all stressful clinical situations, and exhibited lower levels of empathy.

Our study found that first-year students demonstrated a higher level of inclusive attitudes towards disabled individuals in both social and healthcare contexts. Çömez and Altan Sarıkaya (2017), found that students in the first two years of their education were more willing to care for disabled patients. Additionally, a study examining university students' attitudes towards the disabled indicated that second-year students had more inclusive attitudes (Altunhan, Bayer and Açak, 2021). Our study's findings diverge from these results, which may be attributed to the impact of communication and psychology courses that first-year students completed as part of their programs.

To provide effective care for disabled individuals, students need to have a deeper understanding of their needs (Genç, 2015). Our study found that students who expressed a desire for education on disabilities had more positive attitudes towards disabled women and social support compared to those who did not wish to receive such education. Apaydın and Barış (2021) emphasized the importance of frequent training to raise awareness about individuals with disabilities and noted that most nurses were eager to participate in such training. Some studies conducted in the USA and Africa suggest that including individuals with disabilities in education is essential for making the care provided to disabled people effective in undergraduate nursing programs (Gonzalez and Hsiao, 2020; Moodley and Mchunu, 2022). Such innovative and distinct approaches have the potential to enhance students' motivation to engage in their studies. In a study conducted in our country, it was found that midwives and nurses who sought training on disabled women had greater awareness of reproductive health issues faced by disabled individuals (Cebe Ertaş, 2023). A study conducted in Australia to assess the quantity and quality of courses for individuals with disabilities within the undergraduate nursing curriculum found that the insufficient coverage of basic content related to disabilities negatively impacted students' ability to provide care for individuals with disabilities (Troller et al., 2016). Our findings support these results, suggesting that nursing and midwifery students who are interested in disability education tend to approach the issues faced by disabled women with greater sensitivity, respect, and inclusivity.

Since this study is cross-sectional, it reflects data from a specific point in time. The study was conducted with nursing and midwifery students enrolled in a Faculty of Health Sciences in one province. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all nursing and midwifery students across universities in Türkiye. Despite its limitations, this study is expected to contribute to the literature as it is the first to examine the attitudes of nursing and midwifery students toward both women with disabilities and people with disabilities in healthcare together.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study found that students generally held positive attitudes towards women with disabilities and disabled patients in healthcare. First-year nursing and midwifery students demonstrated more inclusive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in both social and healthcare contexts. Furthermore, these positive attitudes were notably higher among female students, second-year students, and those who expressed a desire to receive education on disabilities. These findings highlight key factors in fostering positive attitudes necessary for providing effective, problem-oriented care to disabled women in clinical practice. To foster more positive attitudes toward the care of disabled women, efforts should be made to reach more disabled women through collaboration with municipalities, allowing students to provide preventive health services. This approach would enable students to engage with disabled women as clients, better understand the challenges they face, and gain deeper insight into their issues when offering health services as patients. Additionally, implementing empathy-building activities for students could be beneficial in cultivating more positive attitudes.

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