

## Evaluation of The Image of The Nursing Profession in The Society: A Descriptive and Cross-Sectional Study

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### ABSTRACT

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**Objective:** This study aimed to assess the image of the nursing profession in Turkish society during the post-pandemic normalization process.

**Material and Methods:** A descriptive and cross-sectional design was used. The study was conducted between December 2022 and April 2023 with 645 participants from Türkiye's seven geographical regions. The population of the study consists of individuals aged 18 to 75 living in the seven regions of Turkey. Data were collected online using a demographic form and the Image of the Nursing Profession Scale. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25. This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

**Results:** The average Nursing Profession Image score for participants was found to be  $148.56 \pm 14.75$ , indicating a good level of perception according to the scale classification. A statistically significant difference was found between gender and companion status, and total image scores. Regional differences also affected perceptions of professional qualifications, working conditions, and appearance ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The nursing profession's image was found to be positive in the post-pandemic period. Gender, being a patient companion, and region of residence influenced perceptions. Regular monitoring of the nursing image is recommended, along with identifying areas for improvement and developing supportive strategies.

**Key Words:** Attitude, community-based participatory research, professional role.

### 1.INTRODUCTION

Nursing is defined as a profession that "provides autonomous and collaborative care to sick or healthy individuals from all ages, families, groups, and communities in all environments; promotes health promotion and disease prevention; and cares for patients, disabled, and people in the palliative period"(1). Nurses play important roles such as advocacy, ensuring a safe environment, participating in research activities, contributing to the development of health policies, and providing

education (2). Nursing has historically been perceived as a feminine profession associated with caregiving roles (3,4). How nurses are portrayed in the media especially plays a decisive role in creating this perception. In societies where gender equality is low, the use of negative stereotypes and including unrealistic representations in the representation of the nursing profession negatively affects the public image of nursing and reduces the interest and respect for the nursing profession (5). The status of a profession in a society is directly

linked to the image of the group that creates this profession in the society. "Nursing image" refers to the professional impression that nursing leaves on society; it is the judgmental form of elements such as role/responsibility, competence, communication, and status (6, 7). Variables such as region, gender, and being a caregiver can differentiate this image through social norms, role knowledge acquired through education, media representations, economic conditions, and access to/experience of healthcare services (7, 8). Therefore, nursing image should be considered a strategic policy variable that can affect both the inclination towards nursing and the regional distribution of the workforce (6, 8). A negative public image also has a negative impact on the development of self-concept and professional identity of nurses. In a study on working life and professions in Turkey, nursing ranked 30th with 65.42 points in the 2020 professional reputation score ranking, while in the 2015 version of the same study, it ranked 21st with 70.57 points, showing that there was a decrease in the professional reputation score until the pandemic period (9). The studies conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic period showed that the media representation and public perception were more positive (10-12).

COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, spread rapidly worldwide and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) from March 11, 2020, to May 5, 2023. WHO declared "2020 the Year of the Nurse and Midwife". The visibility of nurses increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which positively impacted the image of nursing in society (13).

The aim of the study was to evaluate the public image of the nursing profession in Türkiye after the post-pandemic normalization process and to determine the factors affecting the professional image.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1. Design, setting and participants**

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted online in 7 geographical regions of the Republic of Turkey between December 2022 and April 2023.

The study population consisted of 60,871,256 people aged 18-75 and above, who accessed the questionnaire sent via web-based survey and volunteered to participate in the study (14). The inclusion criteria for the study were being 18 years of age or older, volunteering to participate in the study, and approving informed consent. The final sample consisted of 645 participants, including an additional 10% to account for potential data loss. Because of the online recruitment strategy, a response rate could not be calculated. Participation in the online survey was voluntary; therefore, a convenience sampling approach was used. In addition, a quota-based strategy was applied to ensure representation from each geographical region of Türkiye. The quotas for each region were determined proportionally according to the regional population distribution reported by the Turkish Statistical Institute. Data collection continued until the predetermined quota for each region was reached (Central Anatolia Region:105, Mediterranean Region: 83, Aegean Region: 87, Southeastern Anatolia Region: 57, Black Sea Region: 64, Marmara Region: 202, Eastern Anatolia Region: 47).

### **2.2. Data collection**

The data was collected online from individuals aged 18-75 who volunteered to participate in the study through a questionnaire form prepared online (Google Forms) and via online platforms such as link, e-mail, Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. The individuals who completed the online form completely were included in the study. The questionnaire was designed so that all items

required a response in the online form; therefore, missing data did not occur in the dataset.

**Instruments:** The data collection tool in the study consists of two parts: in the first part, there are 13 questions about individual characteristics created by the researchers. In the second part, there is the "Image of the Nursing Profession Scale [INPS]", which consists of 42 statements.

**Image of the Nursing Profession Scale:** This is a Likert-type scale developed by Dost and Bahçecik (2015), ranging from "5" (totally agree) to "1" (totally disagree). The scale contains positive and negative items (15). As the score on the scale increases, the perception of the nursing profession's image also increases positively. The score that can be obtained on the scale ranges from 42 to 210. The total score ranges from 42 to 75, which means "very poor";

from 76 to 109, "poor"; from 110 to 143, "average"; from 144 to 177, "good"; and from 178 to 210, "very good" perception. Cronbach's alpha was calculated as  $\alpha=0.885$  for the entire scale. In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the Nursing Profession Image Scale was 0.757. The sub-dimensions are Professional Qualifications ( $\alpha=0.865$ ), Working Conditions ( $\alpha=0.606$ ), Gender ( $\alpha=0.608$ ), Education ( $\alpha=0.870$ ), Professional Status ( $\alpha=0.589$ ), Appearance ( $\alpha=0.901$ ).

### 2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess normality. Because the data did not show a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used. Results were interpreted at a 95% confidence interval with a

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of individuals participating in the study (n=645).

Variables	n (%)	
Region lived in	Mediterranean	83 (12.9)
	Aegean	87 (13.5)
	Central Anatolia	105 (16.3)
	Black Sea	64 (9.9)
	Southeastern Anatolia	57 (8.8)
	Marmara	202 (31.3)
	Eastern Anatolia	47 (7.3)
Age (36.53±18.09)	18-30	242 (37.5)
	31-43	231 (35.8)
	44 and above	172 (26.7)
Gender	Female	400 (62.0)
	Male	245 (38.0)
Educational Level	Primary school	45 (7.0)
	High school	181 (28.1)
	University	337 (52.2)
	Postgraduate	82 (12.7)
Income Level	High	171 (26.5)
	Medium	406 (62.9)
	Low	68 (10.5)
Is There Any Nurse Family Member?	Yes	192 (29.8)
	No	453 (70.2)
Is there Hospitalization?	Yes	400 (62.0)
	No	245 (38.0)
Status of Receiving Nursing Service	Yes	598 (92.7)
	No	47 (7.3)
Place of Service	Hospital	564 (87.4)
	Family Health Center	49 (7.6)
	Other	32 (5.0)
Status of Being a Companion	Yes	474 (73.5)
	No	171 (26.5)
Status of Hospitalization during the Pandemic Period	Yes	55 (8.5)
	No	590 (91.5)
Status of Experiencing the COVID-19	Yes	208 (32.2)
	No	437 (67.8)
Status of Needing for Nursing Services during the Pandemic Period	Yes	198 (30.7)
	No	447 (69.3)
Total	645(100)	

**Table 2.** Mean scores and reliability coefficients of the image of the INPS and sub-scales.

Scale and Sub-Dimension	Items	Min-Max	Mean±SD
The Image of the Nursing Profession	1-42	42-210	148.56±14.75
Professional Qualifications	1-11	11-55	45.60±7.20
Working Conditions	12-21	10-50	26.35±5.40
Gender	22-29	8-40	27.35±5.68
Education	30-34	5-25	19.67±3.38
Professional Status	35-39	5-25	18.60±4.92
Appearance	40-42	3-15	10.95±3.09

**Table 3.** Comparison of the mean scores of the INPS according to the descriptive characteristics of the individuals participating in the study.

Variables	N	Mean±SD	Median	U/ KW	p	
Region lived in	Mediterranean	83	149.39±16.47	150	6.949	0.326
	Aegean	87	149.43±10.02	149		
	Central Anatolia	105	146.63±17.35	149		
	Black Sea	64	148.37±17.70	150		
	Southeastern Anatolia	57	148.50±13.61	150		
	Marmara	202	147.92±14.39	150		
	Eastern Anatolia	47	152.85±10.22	154		
Age (36.53±18.09)	18-30	242	148.14±15.58	150	1.945	0.378
	31-43	231	148.92±12.47	150		
	44 and above	172	148.67±16.35	152		
Gender*	Female	400	147.71±15.19	149	43884.00	<b>0.026</b>
	Male	245	149.94±13.94	151		
Educational Level	Primary school	45	148.86±16.44	151	5.121	0.163
	High school	181	148.29±15.52	150		
	University	337	149.01±14.79	150		
	Postgraduate	82	147.13±11.76	147		
Income Level	High	171	148.19±16.63	150	0.041	0.980
	Medium	406	148.65±13.76	150		
	Low	68	148.92±15.69	150		
Is There Any Nurse Family Member?	Yes	192	147.19±16.29	149	40388.50	0.152
	No	453	149.14±14.03	150		
Is there Hospitalization?	Yes	400	148.49±14.35	150	48950.500	0.985
	No	245	148.67±15.42	150		
Status of Receiving Nursing Service	Yes	598	148.70±14.60	150	13435.50	0.615
	No	47	146.72±16.67	150		
Place of Service	Hospital	564	148.86±14.20	150	1.578	0.454
	FHC	49	144.36±20.62	150		
	Other	32	148.82±13.09	150		
Status of Being a Companion*	Yes	474	147.76±15.26	150	36253.50	<b>0.041</b>
	No	171	150.78±13.03	151		
Status of Hospitalization during the Pandemic Period	Yes	55	149.27±14.75	148	16202.50	0.986
	No	590	148.49±14.76	150		
Status of Experiencing the COVID-19	Yes	208	149.29±14.41	150	44903.50	0.805
	No	437	148.21±14.92	150		
Status of Needing for Nursing Services during the Pandemic Period	Yes	198	149.00 ±13.40	150	43508.00	0.733
	No	447	148.21±15.32	150		

\*p&lt;0.05, U=Mann Whitney U; KW=Kruskal Wallis

**Table 4.** Comparison of the average scores of the image sub-dimension of the individuals participating in the research regarding the nursing profession by region.

Sub-Dimension	Region	n	Mean±SD	Median	KW	p /Bnf	
Professional Qualifications	Region lived in	Mediterranean (a)	83	46.15±7.16	49	12.618	0.050* e > c
		Aegean (b)	87	46.80±4.56	48		
		Central Anatolia (c)	105	43.55±8.90	47		
		Black Sea (d)	64	45.43±8.03	47.5		
		Southeastern Anatolia (e)	57	46.77±6.48	49		
		Marmara (f)	202	45.50±7.31	47		
		Eastern Anatolia (g)	47	46.27±5.25	48		
Working Conditions	Region lived in	Mediterranean (a)	83	25.60±5.45	25	12.661	0.049* a<c a<f a<d a<g
		Aegean (b)	87	25.39±4.75	26		
		Central Anatolia (c)	105	26.94±6.39	26		
		Black Sea (d)	64	27.37±6.24	26		
		Southeastern Anatolia (e)	57	25.87±4.38	26		
		Marmara (f)	202	26.27±5.07	26		
		Eastern Anatolia (g)	47	27.63±4.94	26		
Gender	Region lived in	Mediterranean	83	28.01±5.60	28	1.579	0.072
		Aegean	87	27.98±4.48	28		
		Central Anatolia	105	28.42±5.18	29		
		Black Sea	64	25.84±7.06	27		
		Southeastern Anatolia	57	25.47±7.27	28		
		Marmara	202	27.12±5.14	28		
		Eastern Anatolia	47	27.35±5.68	29		
Education	Region lived in	Mediterranean	83	20.30±3.23	21	8.686	0.192
		Aegean	87	20.21±2.16	21		
		Central Anatolia	105	19.27±3.81	20		
		Black Sea	64	19.26±3.75	21		
		Southeastern Anatolia	57	19.91±3.35	21		
		Marmara	202	19.33±3.56	21		
		Eastern Anatolia	47	18.60±4.92	21		
Professional Status	Region lived in	Mediterranean	83	18.32±5.13	19	5.128	0.527
		Aegean	87	18.49±4.90	19		
		Central Anatolia	105	18.09±4.74	18		
		Black Sea	64	19.17±4.74	20		
		Southeastern Anatolia	57	18.71±4.94	19		
		Marmara	202	19.87±3.82	19		
		Eastern Anatolia	47	18.60±4.92	20		
Appearance	Region lived in	Mediterranean (a)	83	11.00±3.48	11	13.162	0.041* a>c d>c f>c g>c
		Aegean (b)	87	10.54±2.60	10		
		Central Anatolia (c)	105	10.34±3.10	10		
		Black Sea(d)	64	11.28±3.07	11		
		Southeastern Anatolia (e)	57	11.75±3.03	12		
		Marmara (f)	202	10.89±3.36	12		
		Eastern Anatolia (g)	47	10.95±3.09	11		

\*p<0.05, KW=Kruskal Wallis, Bnf: Bonferroni

significance threshold of  $p<0.05$ . The Bonferroni analysis was used to determine the difference in multiple comparison.

#### 2.4. Ethics Committee Approval

The research committee approval was received from Balıkesir University Non-invasive Research Ethics Committee on 06.12.2022 with decision number 2022/100. The "Informed Consent Form" was made available to participants online for reading and approval. The study was conducted in

accordance with the ethical standards set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Result

The majority of the individuals participating in the study resided in the Marmara region (31.3%) and were between the ages of 18-30 (37.5%). 62% were women and 52.2% were university graduates. 62.9% of the participants defined their income level as medium, 70.2 % of them had a nurse family

member, 62% were hospitalized at least once in their lives, and 92.7% received service from nurses. Moreover, 87.4% reported that the place where they received health care was hospital, and 73.5% stated that they had been there as a companion at least once. 8.5% were hospitalized during the pandemic period, 32.2% experienced the COVID-19 disease, and 30.7% required nursing services during the pandemic period (Table 1).

The mean of the Image of the Nursing Profession of the individuals participating in the study was found to be  $148.56 \pm 14.75$ . For the sub-scales, the mean was found to be  $45.60 \pm 7.20$  for professional qualifications,  $26.35 \pm 5.40$  for working conditions,  $27.35 \pm 5.68$  for gender,  $19.67 \pm 3.38$  for education,  $18.60 \pm 4.92$  for professional status, and  $10.95 \pm 3.09$  for appearance (Table 2).

When the comparison of the mean INPS scores according to the descriptive characteristics of the participants was examined, while a statistically significant difference was found between gender and companionship and INPS ( $p < 0.05$ ); no statistically significant difference was found between the region of residence, age, educational level, income level, presence of a nurse in the family, hospitalization, receiving service from a nurse, place of service, presence of hospitalization during the pandemic, experiencing the COVID-19, and the need for nursing services during the pandemic period ( $p > 0.05$ ). Moreover, the mean INPS scores of women were lower than those of men. The mean INPS scores of the individuals who did not stay as a companion are higher than those of who stayed as a companion (Table 3).

When the comparison of mean INPS scores of the participants by regions was examined, a statistically significant difference was detected between the professional qualifications, working conditions, and appearance sub-scales and INPS ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4). As a result of the post-hoc analyses, the mean of the professional

qualifications sub-scale of the Southeastern Anatolia Region is higher than that of the Central Anatolia Region. The group that makes a difference in the working conditions sub-scale is the Mediterranean region. The group that makes a difference in the appearance sub-scale is the Central Anatolia Region. Accordingly, the mean of the appearance sub-scale of the Central Anatolia Region is lower than those of the Mediterranean, Marmara, Black Sea, and Eastern Anatolia Regions.

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the image of the nursing profession in Turkish society was perceived at a good level in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. This result is consistent with recent studies conducted after the pandemic reporting a generally positive perception of nursing (16, 17), including research with hospitalized patients during the pandemic period (18). In contrast, studies conducted in Türkiye before the pandemic reported weaker or moderate perceptions of the nursing profession among both students and the general public (19-23). The more positive perception observed in the present study may be related to the increased visibility of nurses during the pandemic and the broader public recognition of their critical role in healthcare systems (24, 25). At the same time, the literature emphasizes that negative perceptions of nursing may still persist due to structural problems such as unfavorable working conditions, limited professional rights, and increasing violence against healthcare workers (15,23). International studies also demonstrate that the public image of nursing varies across countries. For example, while the professional image of nursing is relatively high in Jordan, it is perceived as having lower status compared with other professions in Vietnam (26). Similarly, studies from Israel and Italy indicate that the public perception of nursing has improved, particularly after the pandemic (4, 27). These findings suggest that the

social image of nursing is shaped not only by professional roles but also by broader social, cultural, and healthcare system dynamics.

Another important finding of this study is that the highest mean score was obtained from the professional qualifications sub-dimension, whereas the lowest score was obtained from working conditions. This finding may indicate that society recognizes nurses as competent healthcare professionals but continues to associate the profession with challenging working environments. During the pandemic, the roles and responsibilities of nurses were widely shared with the public through the media, the Turkish Nurses Association (THD), and professional nursing organizations, which may have increased public awareness of nurses' professional competencies (24, 25). However, structural problems related to workforce shortages and unfavorable working conditions continue to affect the public perception of the profession. For example, the number of nurses per capita in Türkiye remains significantly lower than the OECD average (28). In addition, studies conducted during the pandemic reported important deficiencies in physical working environments and workplace conditions in healthcare institutions (29, 30). These ongoing structural challenges may contribute to the relatively lower perception of the nursing image in terms of working conditions.

The findings also indicate that some descriptive characteristics of the participants were associated with differences in nursing image perception. In particular, individuals who had previously stayed in hospitals as companions reported lower perceptions of the nursing profession's image. A similar finding was reported by Baykara Mat and Baykal, who found that staying as a companion negatively affected the general image scores of the Nursing Image Scale among primary healthcare recipients (31). In contrast, Karakaplan and Ulupinar reported that receiving inpatient care during the

pandemic period was associated with a more positive perception of the nursing image (18). These differing results may be related to the unique conditions of the pandemic period. During this time, infection control measures such as the use of personal protective equipment, restricted communication with patients and relatives, and longer periods spent in patient rooms may have limited interpersonal interaction between nurses and patients' relatives (32). Such conditions may create communication barriers and may contribute to a less favorable perception of the nursing profession among companions.

This study found that women had lower perceptions of the nursing profession. The literature presents varying results regarding the impact of gender on the image of nursing. For example, Gündüz et al. (2024) reported no significant gender-related difference in image scores during the pandemic, while Baykara Mat and Baykal (2021) found higher image perception among men in the pre-pandemic period (10, 31). During the pandemic period, nurses had to leave their roles in the family, such as mother, father and spouse, in the background (32). The disruption of the family and social roles of nurses is one of the factors that may lead to a lower perception of image of the nursing profession in society among women.

The findings of the study also indicated some regional differences in the perception of the nursing profession's image across the seven geographical regions of Türkiye. Although the differences in the overall image perception were not statistically significant, the highest perception was observed in the Eastern Anatolia Region, whereas the lowest perception was observed in the Central Anatolia Region. Regional contextual factors may partially explain these differences. For example, previous studies have reported that healthcare workers in the Central Anatolia Region experience higher rates of physical violence compared with other regions

(33). Such negative working environments may influence how the nursing profession is perceived in society. In addition, the mean score of the professional qualifications sub-dimension was significantly higher in the Southeastern Anatolia Region compared with the Central Anatolia Region. This difference may be associated with regional social and educational dynamics that shape perceptions of professional roles (34). These findings suggest that perceptions of nursing may vary depending on regional social and healthcare system characteristics. Therefore, strategies aimed at strengthening the image of nursing should consider regional differences as well as broader structural factors affecting the profession.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The study data were collected online; therefore, individuals without internet access could not participate, which represents an important limitation of this study. In addition, since participation in the survey was voluntary and conducted online, individuals with internet access and higher digital literacy may have been more likely to participate. This situation may have introduced selection bias and may limit the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design of the study also limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Furthermore, the findings are based on self-reported data and may be influenced by social desirability bias. Although participants were recruited from seven geographical regions, unequal sample sizes across regions may have affected regional comparisons and may limit the generalizability of the results. Finally, some subscales of the measurement tool demonstrated relatively low internal consistency coefficients; therefore, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

### **Contribution to the Nursing Profession**

This study contributes to the limited national evidence by examining regional differences in the

perception of the nursing profession's image in Türkiye. The study can guide policy makers in the process of determining regional and national health policies. The perception of the image of the nursing profession also provides guidance for new candidates who will choose the profession. In this respect, the study results will shed light on nurses, managers nurses, and academicians who will carry out studies on strengthening the nursing image by taking into account the image perceptions between the regions. The study results show that the nursing image in society is affected by the characteristics and experiences of individuals. In the post-pandemic period in Türkiye, it is seen that the image of nursing in society has been positively affected compared to the pre-pandemic period. However, there is also a striking result revealed in the study: the perception of nursing image was lower in those who stayed as companions. This situation draws attention to the necessity of identifying deficiencies in the execution of nursing services and making the necessary improvements.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it was determined that the nursing image in society in Turkey was at a good level towards the end of the pandemic period. The image of the nursing profession varies between the regions regarding professional qualifications, working conditions, and appearance. The gender of the participants and their previous hospital stay as companions affected the perception of the image of the nursing profession. Addressing the expectations of patient companions may contribute to improving the public image of nursing. It is recommended to monitor the image of the nursing profession at regular intervals, identify areas that need to be corrected, and plan initiatives. Healthcare institutions and policymakers should prioritize interventions aimed at improving nurses' working conditions, strengthening communication with patients and their companions, and increasing

public awareness of professional nursing roles. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to better understand the determinants and changes in the nursing image over time.

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