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Research Article

The Relationship Between Midwifery Students' Views of the Profession and Their Levels of Professional Belonging

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Abstract

This descriptive and correlational cross-sectional study examined the relationship between midwifery students' views of the midwifery profession and their levels of professional belonging. The study population comprised 478 midwifery students at Karabük University. A total-enumeration approach was used; all eligible students were invited to participate, and the study was completed with 215 students who volunteered to participate (response rate: 45.0%). Data were collected using a Demographic Information Form, a descriptive questionnaire assessing students' views of their education and the profession, and the Midwifery Belonging Scale. Analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0. The mean age of the students was 20.71 ± 1.79 years, 44.7% ranked midwifery among their first five programme choices, and 78.6% reported being happy when admitted to the programme. Satisfaction with midwifery education was moderately and positively correlated with a professional and autonomous perspective ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$). Professional belonging was weakly and positively correlated with satisfaction with midwifery education ($r = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$) and with a professional and autonomous perspective ($r = 0.138$, $p = 0.043$). The perceived impact of education on professional perspective was not significantly correlated with these variables. Fourth-year students had higher satisfaction with midwifery education than first-year students. Professional belonging was also weakly associated with age. These findings indicate that educational satisfaction, professional perceptions, and selected student characteristics are associated with professional belonging; however, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inferences.

Keywords: Midwifery, Professional Autonomy, Professional Belonging, Professional Role, Students.

Özet

Bu tanımlayıcı, korelasyonel ve kesitsel çalışma, ebelik öğrencilerinin ebelik mesleğine ilişkin görüşleri ile mesleki aidiyet düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini Karabük Üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 478 ebelik öğrencisi oluşturmıştır. Tam sayım yaklaşımıyla uygun tüm öğrenciler çalışmaya davet edilmiş ve araştırma gönüllü 215 öğrenci ile tamamlanmıştır (katılım oranı: %45,0). Veriler Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu, öğrencilerin eğitim ve mesleğe ilişkin görüşlerini değerlendiren tanımlayıcı form ve Ebeklik Aidiyet Ölçeği ile toplanmıştır. Analizler SPSS 22.0 kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Öğrencilerin yaş ortalaması $20,71 \pm 1,79$ yıl olup %44,7' si ebelik bölümünü ilk beş tercihi arasında belirtmiş, %78,6' sı bölümü kazandığında sevindiğini ifade etmiştir. Ebeklik eğitiminden memnuniyet ile profesyonel ve otonom bakış açısı arasında pozitif ve orta düzeyde ilişki bulunmuştur ($r = 0,368$; $p < 0,001$). Mesleki aidiyet; ebeklik eğitiminden memnuniyet ($r = 0,239$; $p < 0,001$) ve profesyonel ve otonom bakış açısı ($r = 0,138$; $p = 0,043$) ile pozitif ancak zayıf düzeyde ilişkili bulunmuştur. Eğitimin mesleki bakış açısına etkisi ile incelenen diğer değişkenler arasında anlamlı ilişki saptanmamıştır. Dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin ebeklik eğitiminden memnuniyet puanları birinci sınıf öğrencilerinden daha yüksektir. Mesleki aidiyet ayrıca yaş ile zayıf düzeyde ilişkili bulunmuştur. Bulgular, eğitim memnuniyeti, mesleki algılar ve bazı öğrenci özelliklerinin mesleki aidiyetle ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir; ancak kesitsel tasarım nedensel çıkarıma olanak vermemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ebeklik, Mesleki Özerklik, Mesleki Aidiyet, Mesleki Rol, Öğrenciler.



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INTRODUCTION

Midwifery has evolved from traditional practice into a regulated health profession grounded in scientific knowledge, clinical skills, ethical principles, and professional autonomy (Kartal & Aksoy, 2021). University education is an important period in which students develop their views of the profession, expectations about their future roles, and sense of connection to the professional community (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021). These perceptions may shape how students interpret the scope, status, and responsibilities of midwifery during their education.

In this study, professional perception refers to students' views and attitudes concerning the midwifery profession, including its professional and autonomous characteristics. Professional belonging refers to the extent to which students feel that they are part of and connected to the midwifery profession; this is the principal outcome assessed with the Midwifery Belonging Scale (Baskaya et al., 2020). Professional identity is a broader developmental construct describing how individuals understand and integrate their professional role into their sense of self (Sun et al., 2022). Although these concepts are related, they are not interchangeable. The present study therefore focuses specifically on professional perception and professional belonging, while professional identity is considered only as a broader contextual concept.

Students' perceptions of midwifery and their professional belonging may be associated with several educational and personal factors, including voluntary career choice, grade level, clinical experiences, participation in professional activities, motivation, and the perceived public image of the profession (Aktürk et al., 2021; Çevik & Alan, 2021; Mbalinda et al., 2024; Tiryaki et al., 2024; Yıldırım et al., 2022). Previous studies have reported generally high levels of professional belonging among midwifery students, while also showing that belonging may vary according to educational experiences and professional perceptions (Aktürk et al., 2021; Çevik & Alan, 2021). Accordingly, examining these constructs together may help clarify how students' experiences during midwifery education are associated with their sense of belonging to the profession.

Evidence examining the relationship between midwifery students' views of the profession and professional belonging remains limited in Türkiye (Aktürk et al., 2021; Çevik & Alan, 2021). Clarifying this relationship may provide a basis for educational strategies designed to support students' professional development and connection to midwifery. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between midwifery students' views of the midwifery profession and their levels of professional belonging.

METHOD

Type of Study

This study used a descriptive and correlational cross-sectional design.

Location and Timeframe of the Study

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Karabük University. Data were collected during the 2023–2024 academic year.

The Study Population and Sample

The study population comprised 478 students enrolled in the Midwifery Department at Karabük University during the study period. A total-enumeration approach was adopted and all students who

met the eligibility criteria were invited to participate. Of the 478 students in the population, 215 voluntarily participated and were included in the final analysis, corresponding to a response rate of 45.0%.

Inclusion Criteria

- Being enrolled as a student in the Midwifery Department at Karabük University
- Voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study

Exclusion Criteria

- Declining or withdrawing consent to participate in the study

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected after eligible students had been informed about the purpose, scope, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the questionnaires were administered.

Information Form: This form consists of 10 questions regarding midwifery students' age, grade level, reasons for choosing the midwifery profession, and their views before and after enrolling in the midwifery program.

Descriptive Form: This questionnaire was developed by Atasoy and Ermin (2016) from the relevant literature and includes sections addressing satisfaction with education, professional and autonomous perspectives, the perceived impact of education on professional perspective, and post-graduation plans. The original form contains 38 statements. Two items that were specific to nursing students were not used in the present midwifery sample (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016). The relevant section scores were analysed according to the structure of the original instrument. In the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 11-item section assessing satisfaction with midwifery education was 0.787.

Midwifery Sense of Belonging Scale: The Midwifery Belonging Scale was developed by Baskaya et al. (2020) to assess professional belonging in midwifery. It is a 22-item, five-point Likert-type scale with four dimensions: Emotional Belonging; Fulfilling Professional Roles and Responsibilities; Evaluating Professional Development and Opportunities; and Scope of Duties and Authority in the Profession. There are no reverse-scored items or established cut-off values. Total scores range from 22 to 110, with higher scores indicating stronger professional belonging. The original validation study reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90 for the total scale (Baskaya et al., 2020). In the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.959 for the total scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Emotional Belonging, Fulfilling Professional Roles and Responsibilities, Evaluating Professional Development and Opportunities, and Scope of Duties and Authority in the Profession subscales were 0.950, 0.913, 0.841, and 0.823, respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0. Continuous variables were summarized using mean $\pm$ standard deviation or median (minimum–maximum), as appropriate, and categorical variables were presented as number and percentage. The normality of the scale scores was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values; values between -2 and $+2$ were considered to indicate an acceptable normal distribution. Parametric or non-parametric procedures were selected according to the

distributional characteristics of the data. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to examine associations between continuous or ordinal variables. The Mann–Whitney U test was used for two-group comparisons and the Kruskal–Wallis test for comparisons involving more than two groups when non-parametric testing was required. When a Kruskal–Wallis test was significant, pairwise post-hoc comparisons were used to identify the groups responsible for the difference, as reported in Table 2. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$; correlation coefficients were interpreted cautiously with emphasis on both direction and magnitude.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Karabük University Ethics Committee for Social and Humanities Research (Decision No. 2022/04-31, May 11, 2022). Data collection commenced approximately one year after ethical approval because of scheduling constraints, including pregnancy and maternity leave among members of the research team and academic recess periods for students. Data were collected during the 2023–2024 academic year. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained before data collection.

RESULTS

The study included 215 midwifery students with a mean age of 20.71 ± 1.79 years. The largest group was second-year students (33.5%). Nearly half of the participants (47.4%) reported attending or following scientific meetings related to midwifery, 44.7% had ranked midwifery among their first five programme choices, and the most frequently reported reasons for choosing midwifery were personal preference (47.4%) and ease of finding employment (42.8%). Most participants (78.6%) reported being happy when admitted to the programme. Positive views of the profession were reported by 72.1% before entering the programme and by 98.1% after enrolment. Regarding public image, 51.2% evaluated the image of midwifery positively and 48.8% negatively (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information of midwifery students

Variable	Mean $\pm$ SD*	Median (Min-Max)
Age	20.71 $\pm$ 1.79	21 (18-28)
Class	n	%
1	57	26.5
2	72	33.5
3	29	13.5
4	57	26.5
Status of Attendance at and Participation in Scientific Conferences on Midwifery		
Yes	102	47.4
No	113	52.6
Order of Choice for Midwifery Profession		
1-5	96	44.7
6-10	63	29.3
11 and up	44	20.5
Other	12	5.6

Reasons for Choosing the Midwifery Profession		
Ease of Finding a Job	92	42.8
Personal Preference	102	47.4
Family's Wishes	11	5.1
Tutoring Center's Recommendation	2	0.9
Other (Typing Error)	8	3.7
Her Feelings When She Was Accepted into the Midwifery Program		
I Didn't Feel a Thing	35	16.3
I Was Happy	169	78.6
I Was Sad	11	5.1
Thoughts on the Midwifery Profession Before Joining the Program		
I don't know	41	19.1
Positive	155	72.1
Negative	19	8.8
Her Thoughts on the Midwifery Profession After Joining the Department		
Positive	211	98.1
Negative	4	1.9
The Public Perception of the Midwifery Profession According to Students		
Positive	110	51.2
Negative	105	48.8
The Reason for the Negative Image in Society		
Positive Public Image	56	26.0
Negative Attitudes of Practicing Midwives	18	8.4
Public Perceptions	87	40.5
Midwifery Not Being Viewed as a Profession	52	24.2
Other (Family's Negative Perception)	2	0.9
Total	215	100.0

*SD: Standard Deviation

Age was not significantly associated with satisfaction with midwifery education, a professional and autonomous perspective, or the perceived impact of education on professional perspective; however, age was weakly and positively associated with professional belonging ($r = 0.149$, $p = 0.029$). Fourth-year students had higher satisfaction scores than first-year students ($p = 0.020$). Professional belonging scores were higher among students who attended scientific meetings than among those who did not ($p = 0.007$). Satisfaction with midwifery education was higher among students who ranked midwifery 6th–10th than among those who ranked it 11th or lower ($p = 0.029$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Relationship between students' descriptive characteristics and satisfaction with midwifery education, professional perspective, effect of education on professional perspective, and belongingness scale total scores

Variable	Satisfaction with Midwifery Education	A Professional and Autonomous Perspective	The Impact of Education from a Professional Perspective	Total Score on the Belonging Scale
Age	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Test Stat. ***	0.018	0.109	0.010	0.149
p	0.795	0.112	0.881	0.029
Class	Median (Min-Max)	Median (Min-Max)	Median (Min-Max)	Median (Min-Max)
1 a	28 (8-33)	37 (19-44)	6 (2-8)	83 (56-102)
2 b	30 (6-33)	39 (14-44)	6 (2-8)	86 (58-110)
3 c	29,5 (9-32)	40 (27-43)	6 (2-8)	82 (73-106)
4 d	31 (17-33)	40,5 (26-48)	6 (2-8)	88 (66-110)
Test Stat.*	9.827	5.743	1.310	7.014
p	0.020 (d > a)	0.125	0.727	0.071
Status of Monitoring and Participating in Scientific Conferences Related to Midwifery				
Yes	30 (6-33)	40 (14-48)	6 (2-8)	88 (56-110)
No	29 (8-33)	39 (18-44)	6 (2-8)	86 (56-110)
Test Stat.**	-0.316	-0.455	-1.075	-2.688
p	0.752	0.649	0.282	0.007
Why Choose the Midwifery Profession				
1-5 a	30 (6-33)	39 (18-48)	6 (2-8)	86 (56-110)
6-10 b	30 (18-33)	39 (25-44)	6 (3-8)	85 (74-106)
11 and up c	28 (9-33)	38 (14-43)	6 (2-8)	86 (56-110)
Other d	32 (10-33)	41 (28-44)	6 (5-8)	90,5 (69-110)
Test Stat.*	9.004	7.773	0.660	3.492
p	0.029 (b > c)	0.051	0.882	0.322
Reasons for Choosing the Midwifery Profession				
Ease of finding a job a	30 (9-33)	40 (14-44)	6 (2-8)	85,5 (58-110)
Personal preference b	30.5 (6-33)	39 (19-48)	6 (2-8)	87 (68-110)
Family preference c	24 (10-27)	39 (28-43)	6 (4-8)	84 (69-90)
Recommendation from a tutoring center d	****	****	6 (6-6)	****
Other (coding error) e	25.5 (17-30)	36 (27-39)	6 (2-8)	83 (56-86)
Test Stat.*	18.931	4.016	4.842	15.411
p	0.001 (a,b > c)	0.404	0.303	0.004 (b > e)
Her Feelings When She Was Accepted into the Midwifery Program				
I didn't feel anything a	28 (9-33)	39,50 (22-44)	6 (2-8)	82 (66-110)

I was happy b	30 (6-33)	39 (14-48)	6 (2-8)	87 (56-110)
I was sad c	28 (18-30)	40 (32-42)	6 (6-8)	84 (66-93)
Test Stat.*	6.553	0.080	5.261	9.615
p	0.038 (b > c)	0.961	0.072	0.008 (b > a)
Thoughts on the Midwifery Profession Before Joining the Department				
I don't know a	30 (10-33)	39 (28-44)	7 (5-8)	86 (66-104)
Yes b	30 (6-33)	39 (14-48)	6 (2-8)	87 (56-110)
No c	23 (9-32)	35 (22-42)	6 (2-8)	77 (56-89)
Test Stat.*	4.463	2.333	1.331	9.009
p	0.107	0.311	0.513	0.011 (b > c)
Thoughts on the Midwifery Profession After Joining the Department				
I don't know	****	****	****	****
Yes	30 (6-33)	39 (14-48)	6 (2-8)	86 (56-110)
No	18 (9-22)	32 (27-32)	3 (2-8)	66 (56-73)
Test Stat.*	9.253	7.644	1.399	10.837
p	0.002	0.006	0.236	0.001
Midwifery According to Students The Profession's Image in Society				
I don't know	****	****	****	****
Positive	30 (6-33)	39 (19-48)	6 (2-8)	86,5 (56-110)
Negative	28 (9-33)	39 (14-44)	6 (2-8)	86 (58-110)
Test Stat.*	2.885	0.134	0.016	0.048
p	0.089	0.714	0.899	0.826
The Reason for the Negative Image in Society				
It has a positive image in society	31 (6-33)	40 (19-44)	6 (2-8)	87 (77-110)
Negative attitudes among practicing midwives	29 (22-33)	40 (32-43)	6 (2-8)	88 (56-110)
Societal judgments	30 (9-33)	39 (14-48)	6 (2-8)	86 (66-110)
Midwifery not being viewed as a profession	28 (17-33)	38 (18-44)	6 (3-8)	87 (58-106)
Other (Family's negative views)	****	****	5.5 (5-6)	****
Test Stat.*	7.762	1.908	2.419	1.310
p	0.101	0.753	0.659	0.860

*Kruskal–Wallis test; **Mann–Whitney U test; ***Spearman correlation; ****Statistical analysis could not be performed because of insufficient subgroup size.

Satisfaction with midwifery education differed according to the reason for choosing the programme ($p = 0.001$), with higher scores among students who selected midwifery because of personal preference or ease of finding employment than among those who selected it because of family preference. Professional belonging also differed by reason for choosing the programme ($p = 0.004$), with higher scores among students reporting personal preference than among those in the 'other' category (Table 2).

Students who reported being happy when admitted to the midwifery programme had higher satisfaction scores than those who reported being sad ($p = 0.038$), and higher professional belonging scores than those who reported no particular feeling ($p = 0.008$) (Table 2).

Professional belonging differed according to students' views of midwifery before entering the programme ($p = 0.011$), with higher scores among those with positive than negative views. After entering the programme, students with positive views had higher satisfaction with midwifery education ($p = 0.002$), higher professional and autonomous perspective scores ($p = 0.006$), and higher professional belonging scores ($p = 0.001$) than those with negative views (Table 2).

Satisfaction with midwifery education was positively correlated with a professional and autonomous perspective ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$) and with professional belonging ($r = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$). A professional and autonomous perspective was also weakly and positively correlated with professional belonging ($r = 0.138$, $p = 0.043$) (Table 3).

The perceived impact of education on professional perspective was not significantly correlated with satisfaction with midwifery education ($r = 0.100$, $p = 0.142$), a professional and autonomous perspective ($r = 0.106$, $p = 0.122$), or professional belonging ($r = 0.090$, $p = 0.188$) (Table 3).

Table 4. Relationship Between Students' Post-Graduation Plans and Professional Belonging Scores

Students' Thoughts After Graduation	Belonging Scale Total Score
1. After I Graduate, I Would Like to Work in Hospitals, Family Health Centers, etc.	Median (Min-Max)
I Don't Know	88 (53-97)
I Disagree	86 (58-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	85 (56-97)
I Agree	87 (56-110)
Test Stat.*	5.746
p	0.125
2. I'm Thinking About Becoming a Teacher After I Graduate	
I Don't Know	87 (53-104)
I Disagree	86 (56-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	88 (58-110)
I Agree	87 (66-110)
Test Stat.*	3.574
p	0.311
3. I Want to Work as a Manager After Graduating	
I Don't Know	88 (53-106)
I Disagree	86 (56-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	86 (56-110)

I Agree	88 (66-110)
Test Stat.*	3.235
p	0.357
4. I Want to Work as an Academic After Graduation	
I Don't Know	85 (53-94)
I Disagree	86 (70-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	86,5 (58-110)
I Agree	88 (56-110)
Test Stat.*	4.741
p	0.192
5. After I graduate, I want to work in a field other than my major	
I Don't Know	87 (53-94)
I Disagree	87 (66-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	86 (56-101)
I Agree	87 (56-110)
Test Stat.*	1.163
p	0.762
6. I want to work at a private hospital after I graduate	
I Don't Know	88 (53-110)
I Disagree	87 (56-110)
I Neither Agree Nor Disagree	86 (56-110)
I Agree	87 (66-110)
Test Stat.*	1.157
p	0.763

*Kruskal–Wallis test

Professional belonging scores did not differ significantly according to any of the post-graduation career plans examined, including intentions to work in clinical settings, teach, undertake leadership roles, pursue an academic career, work outside the field, or work in a private hospital (all $p > 0.05$) (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' perspectives on their profession and their levels of professional commitment, and to reveal how this relationship evolves throughout the educational process. In this context, our findings have been discussed in light of the relevant literature, highlighting both similarities and differences. Additionally, our results have been evaluated in terms of implications for strengthening students' professional commitment.

In our study, no significant relationship was found between age and satisfaction with midwifery education, attitudes toward the profession, or the impact of education on professional perspectives. This suggests that the age variable may not be a determining factor in these attitudinal dimensions. In contrast, the finding of a significant relationship between age and the total score on the sense of belonging scale suggests that students' sense of professional belonging may strengthen as they get older. Our study's findings align with the results presented in Eroğlu and Akbaş's (2025) study, which indicated that the level of belonging among midwifery students showed statistically significant differences based on the age variable. In light of these findings, while age may not directly shape

professional attitudes, it may have an indirect effect on professional belonging through the experience and awareness that develop over time (Eroğlu & Akbaş, 2025).

In our study, it was observed that students' satisfaction levels regarding their midwifery education increased as the educational process progressed. This result is corroborated by that of Atasoy & Ermin (2016), where it was found that professional attitudes of a considerable number of the students improved positively over time throughout the educational process (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016). Similarly, Demir's (2024) study, which demonstrates that professional perception and subscale scores increase as grade level rises, supports this trend (Demir, 2024). In addition, the results of Akmaz et al. (2025), showing an important rise in midwifery identity scores according to the advancement of grade levels, point out the importance of the educational process in the development of professional identity (Akmaz et al., 2025). This result is aligned with the view of Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009), who suggest that greater exposure to clinical practice and the realization of one's professional identity are central components of developing a sense of belonging (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). On the other hand, it is evident that not all findings in the literature point in the same direction. The finding by Çevik and Alan (2021) that third-year students' sense of belonging scores were higher than those of fourth-year students suggests that the development of a sense of belonging may not follow a linear trajectory (Çevik & Alan, 2021). These results suggest that the modifications between grade levels need to be assessed based not only on educational time but also in relation to other variables like clinical exposure, personal motivation, and professionalism.

Approximately half of the students reported following or attending scientific meetings related to midwifery, and those who participated had higher professional belonging scores. Similar associations have been reported by Aktürk et al. (2021) and Karaman et al. (2024), who found higher belonging among students engaged in professional scientific events, certificate training, or research activities. Taken together, these findings suggest an association between professional engagement and belonging; however, the present cross-sectional data do not establish that participation itself increases belonging (Aktürk et al., 2021; Karaman et al., 2024).

In our study, an analysis of midwifery as a career choice revealed that 44.7% of participants listed midwifery among their top 1–5 choices. Similarly, in the study by Demir and Taşpınar (2021), it was reported that 55.6% of students listed midwifery among their top five choices. These results support the notion that a significant portion of students choose the profession consciously and voluntarily (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021). However, the finding in our study that students who ranked midwifery as their 6th–10th choice reported higher levels of satisfaction with their education compared to those who ranked it 11th or higher suggests that choices made when motivation is lower may negatively affect satisfaction levels.

In our study, the fact that “personal preference” and “ease of finding employment” were the most prominent reasons students chose the midwifery profession is generally consistent with the literature. The study by Aktürk et al. (2021) also showed that a significant proportion of students chose the profession voluntarily (Aktürk et al., 2021). Various studies in the literature have also emphasized that job security is one of the primary motivations for career choice (Amanak et al., 2020; Demir & Taşpınar, 2021; Yıldırım et al., 2022; Yurtsal et al., 2014; Yücel et al., 2017). International studies also support our findings. While Kraja et al. (2022) highlighted the decisive role of social and economic factors, particularly job security and career opportunities, Tadesse et al. (2020) noted that individual and environmental factors also influence career choice (Kraja et al., 2022; Tadesse et al., 2020). The finding in our study that there is a significant relationship between satisfaction with midwifery education and

levels of professional belonging based on the reason for choosing the profession—particularly that students who chose the profession voluntarily have higher levels of satisfaction and belonging—is strongly consistent with the literature. This finding aligns with the results of Eroğlu and Akbaş (2025), Karaahmet (2023), and Aktürk et al. (2021), demonstrating that voluntary career choice is a decisive factor in professional belonging and belonging (Aktürk et al., 2021; Eroğlu & Akbaş, 2025; Karaahmet, 2023). Furthermore, this finding is supported by evidence of a positive relationship between positive attitudes toward the profession (enjoying one’s work, job satisfaction, and participation in professional activities) and a sense of belonging (Aktürk et al., 2021). However, while the low level of family influence differs from the relative impact reported in some studies (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021), it generally suggests that students tend to make career choices based on more autonomous and intrinsic motivations. In this context, the findings reveal that both intrinsic motivations and external assurances play a role in the choice of the midwifery profession, and that voluntary choice, in particular, plays a critical role in terms of professional adaptation and belonging.

In this study, the fact that the vast majority of students felt joy upon being admitted to the midwifery program indicates that their initial attitudes toward the profession are generally positive. However, the fact that some felt nothing or reported negative emotions suggests that career choices are not always made consciously and voluntarily. From the research findings of Yurtsal et al. (2014), it is evident that among the respondents, there were 51.6% who experienced happiness upon admission into the program, 16.2% experienced sadness, while 32.2% experienced no emotions at all. This indicates that reactions of students may differ according to sample (Yurtsal et al., 2014). In our study, the finding that students who were happy upon being admitted to their department had higher levels of both satisfaction and a sense of belonging suggests that initial positive emotions influence professional adaptation. Another significant finding in our study is the marked increase in positive attitudes toward the profession as the educational process progresses. This finding is consistent with a possible role of midwifery education in supporting professional identity and is consistent with the reported increase in positive attitudes following education in the studies by Demir and Taşpınar (2021) and Yurtsal et al. (2014) (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021; Yurtsal et al., 2014). Moreover, the professional satisfaction and positive professional image noted by Aktürk et al. (2021) and Ergin et al. (2024) further are consistent with our findings (Aktürk et al., 2021; Ergin et al., 2024). As mentioned by Eroğlu and Akbaş (2025), the majority of the students have positive attitudes towards the midwifery program, and they have higher levels of belongingness (Eroğlu & Akbaş, 2025). On the other hand, the fact that the students with a negative attitude performed worse in all aspects means that professional perception is an important factor when it comes to satisfaction, point of view, and sense of belonging. Nevertheless, it is also stated that the perceptions of professionals are not always completely positive. For instance, Yılmaz et al. (2014), in a study carried out on nurses and midwives, concluded that the existence of some negative perceptions of the future of the profession shows that professional perception might not be dependent only on the educational process but also on structural factors (Yılmaz et al., 2014). In this context, the findings indicate that midwifery education is effective in fostering a positive professional perception, but that systemic factors must not be overlooked in ensuring the sustainability of this perception.

The study found that students’ views on the public image of the midwifery profession were roughly divided. This indicates that the public perception of the profession has not been clearly and strongly shaped in a positive direction. Some studies in the literature suggest that negative perceptions are more prevalent. In the study by Yurtsal et al. (2014), it was noted that 69.1% of students evaluated the public image of the midwifery profession negatively, and that the most significant reason for this

negative perception was societal judgments (57.7%) (Yurtsal et al., 2014). Similarly, in our study, the fact that societal judgments (40.5%) and the perception that midwifery is not sufficiently recognized as a profession (24.2%) underlie the negative image indicates that this finding aligns with the literature. On the other hand, the fact that 26% of the students in this study reported that the profession's image in society is positive suggests that perceptions of the profession are not entirely negative and that a certain level of awareness is beginning to emerge. However, the literature indicates that the social status of the midwifery profession is generally perceived as moderate or low (Yücel et al., 2017). Additionally, there are studies indicating that midwifery is mostly perceived as a low-status profession and that midwives are viewed solely as those who assist in childbirth (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021; Gökçek & Yazıcı, 2022). This situation highlights that the scope of the profession and the professional role are not sufficiently understood by society. In this context, the literature also includes various recommendations aimed at strengthening the social image of the midwifery profession. In the study by Demir and Taşpınar (2021), students made recommendations such as better introducing the profession to the public and informing the public (25.7%), improving working conditions and economic rights (18.5%), advocating for the rights of midwives (11.3%), and increasing professional organization (9.3%) (Demir & Taşpınar, 2021). These recommendations indicate the need to increase awareness campaigns to strengthen the public perception of the midwifery profession and to improve professional conditions.

The moderate positive correlation between satisfaction with midwifery education and a professional and autonomous perspective indicates that students who reported greater educational satisfaction also tended to report stronger professional and autonomous views. Previous studies have similarly described more positive professional perceptions across the educational process and have emphasized the contribution of supportive learning environments to students' professional development (Ay et al., 2018b; Folkvord & Risa, 2023; Yücel et al., 2018). Because the present study is cross-sectional, this association should not be interpreted as evidence that educational satisfaction causes changes in professional autonomy or professional perception.

The association between educational satisfaction and professional belonging was positive but weak, indicating that the two constructs are related while also remaining distinct. Previous research suggests that belonging is shaped not only by classroom education but also by clinical experiences, social acceptance, communication, and integration within practice settings (McKenna et al., 2013; Öner & Kartal, 2026; Saadatbakht et al., 2020). The small magnitude of the correlation in the present study is therefore consistent with the view that professional belonging is multidimensional and may reflect influences beyond educational satisfaction alone.

A professional and autonomous perspective was also weakly and positively associated with professional belonging. This small correlation suggests that feeling professionally competent or autonomous and feeling that one belongs to the profession may develop in related but not identical ways. Previous studies have linked professional perceptions, professional values, and satisfaction with broader indicators of professional development (Berşe et al., 2025; Ekşioğlu et al., 2023; Mohammadi & Khoskhoo, 2022). The present finding should therefore be interpreted as a modest association rather than evidence of a directional effect.

CONCLUSION

Midwifery students' educational satisfaction, professional and autonomous perspectives, and selected personal or educational characteristics were associated with professional belonging. Satisfaction with

midwifery education showed a moderate association with a professional and autonomous perspective, whereas its association with professional belonging was weak. Participation in scientific meetings and positive views of the profession were also associated with higher professional belonging scores. These findings support the value of educational environments that encourage professional engagement and positive professional perceptions, while the cross-sectional design means that no causal conclusions can be drawn. Future multicentre and longitudinal studies are needed to examine how professional belonging develops throughout midwifery education.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

A strength of this study is that all eligible students in the target department were invited through a total-enumeration approach and students from all four academic years were represented, allowing comparisons across different stages of midwifery education. The use of established data-collection instruments, including the Midwifery Belonging Scale with previously demonstrated validity and reliability, is another strength. The study also examined professional belonging alongside a range of educational and professional-perception variables, providing a broad cross-sectional view of factors associated with students' professional belonging.

Several limitations should be considered. The study was conducted at a single university and included 215 of 478 eligible students (45.0%), which may limit generalizability and raises the possibility of non-response bias. Its cross-sectional design does not allow temporal or causal conclusions. Data were self-reported and may therefore be affected by recall or social-desirability bias. In addition, some potentially relevant social, economic, familial, and clinical-experience variables were not assessed in detail. Multicentre and longitudinal studies may help clarify how professional perceptions and belonging change over time.

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Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Karabük University Ethics Committee for Social and Humanities Research (Decision No. 2022/04-31, May 11, 2022). Data collection commenced approximately one year after ethical approval because of scheduling constraints, including pregnancy and maternity leave among members of the research team and academic recess periods for students, and was conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year. The research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary and written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

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