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The Relationship Between Nursing Students' Attitudes Toward Public Health Nursing Course and Their Professional Image

Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinin Halk Sağlığı Hemşireliği Dersi ile Mesleki İmaja Yönelik Tutumları Arasındaki İlişki

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Abstract

Aim: This study aims to determine nursing students' attitudes toward the public health nursing course and their professional image, as well as to examine the relationship between these two attitudes.

Methods: This descriptive-relational study was conducted with 49 nursing students from a university. Data were collected online via self-report after the students completed the public health nursing course, using a Personal and Lesson Information Form, the Public Health Nursing Lesson Attitude Scale, and the Nursing Image Scale.

Results: The mean age of the participants was 21.53 ± 1.27 years, and 71.4% were female. Students scored an average of 2.50 ± 0.99 on the Theory Subscale and 2.64 ± 1.06 on the Practice Subscale of the Public Health Nursing Lesson Attitude Scale. The mean score for the Nursing Image Scale was 72.95 ± 7.64 . A significant positive correlation was found between scores on the Public Health Nursing Lesson Attitude Subscales (Theory and Practice) and the Nursing Image Scale total, as well as the General Appearance and Professional and Educational Qualifications sub-dimensions ($p \leq 0.05$).

Conclusion: The students exhibited moderate attitudes toward the course and high attitudes toward the nursing image. A moderate positive relationship was found between the two attitudes. Educators should develop strategies to support both areas in curriculum planning.

Key Words: Public health nursing; nursing; professional image; student; attitude.

Özet

Amaç: Bu çalışma ile hemşirelik öğrencilerinin, halk sağlığı hemşireliği dersi ve mesleki imaja yönelik tutumlarını belirlemek, iki tutum arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Bu tanımlayıcı-ilişkisel çalışma, bir üniversiteden 49 hemşirelik öğrencisi ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler, öğrencilerin halk sağlığı hemşireliği dersini tamamlamalarının ardından çevrim içi öz bildirim yöntemiyle, Kişisel ve Ders Bilgi Formu, Halk Sağlığı Hemşireliği Dersi Tutum Ölçeği ve Hemşirelik İmajı Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması $21,53 \pm 1,27$ yıl olup, %71,4'ü kadındı. Öğrenciler, Halk Sağlığı Hemşireliği Dersi Tutum Ölçeği'nin Teori Alt Ölçeğinden ortalama $2,50 \pm 0,99$, Uygulama Alt Ölçeğinden ise $2,64 \pm 1,06$ puan aldılar. Hemşirelik İmajı Ölçeği puan ortalaması ise $72,95 \pm 7,64$ olarak bulundu. Halk Sağlığı Hemşireliği Dersi Tutum Ölçeği'nin Teori ve Uygulama alt boyutları ile Hemşirelik İmajı Ölçeği toplam puanı, Genel Görünüm ve Mesleki ve Eğitimsel Yeterlilikler alt boyutları arasında anlamlı pozitif bir ilişki saptandı ($p \leq 0.05$).

Sonuç: Öğrencilerin derse yönelik tutumlarının orta düzeyde, hemşirelik imajına yönelik tutumlarının ise yüksek düzeyde olduğu belirlendi. Her iki tutum arasında orta düzeyde pozitif bir ilişki bulundu. Eğitimcilerin, müfredat planlamasında her iki alanı da destekleyecek stratejiler geliştirmeleri önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halk sağlığı hemşireliği; hemşirelik; mesleki imaj; öğrenci; tutum.

Introduction

The demand for public health services has risen due to global population growth, increasing poverty and health inequalities, environmental degradation, limited access to primary healthcare, and the widespread adoption of unhealthy behaviors.⁽¹⁾ The rising prevalence of chronic diseases among the aging population, driven by increased life expectancy, has shifted the focus of care from hospitals to community-based settings.⁽²⁾ Public health teams implement practices that integrate science and art to protect and enhance community health, including health education, early diagnosis and screening, environmental health initiatives, and immunization programs. Nurses have been a part of these teams since the inception of modern nursing. Societal changes further highlight the importance of public health nursing education in undergraduate nursing programs.^(1,3)

In Turkey, public health nursing courses are part of undergraduate nursing curricula and include both theoretical and practical components to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes.^(1,4) Quality education is essential for training professional nurses capable of advancing public health nursing.⁽⁵⁾ In addition to education, students' attitudes play a significant role in acquiring public health nursing skills.⁽⁶⁾ Attitudes, defined as an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward objects, situations, and events,⁽⁷⁾ are expected to be positive among nursing students regarding public health nursing courses.⁽³⁾ Students' attitudes significantly influence their academic success, decisions about which nursing sector to pursue after graduation, and their ability to fulfill the roles of public health nurses, such as health educator, caregiver, and consultant for patients or healthy individuals.^(3,6)

Attitudes toward public health nursing courses are crucial for enabling students to implement healthcare services aligned with the philosophy of public health in their professional lives. However, there is limited research in the literature investigating attitudes toward public health nursing courses.^(3,6) Nurses' attitudes and behaviors can also be considered a factor influencing the public image of nursing.⁽⁸⁾ The nursing image reflects society's perceptions of nurses' roles and skills and the respect given to them. The value nursing students and practicing nurses place on their profession and their professional image can also impact the societal perception of nursing. Displaying comprehensive nursing roles, including those in public health nursing, can enhance the public image of nursing. While nursing education involves various courses, public health nursing is particularly significant as it teaches students to provide holistic

healthcare services to healthy and ill individuals, families, and communities through its community-centered philosophy.

This study aims to deepen our understanding of how nursing students perceive their roles in public health nursing. It also explores how these perceptions may shape the broader image of the nursing profession. By exploring the relationship between students' attitudes toward public health nursing and the nursing image, this research aims to provide insights into how nursing education can be improved to foster a more positive professional image and enhance the holistic care provided by future nurses. This study will provide valuable insights for nursing students by demonstrating how their attitudes toward the profession and its roles can shape both their personal development and the societal perception of nursing.

Study Aim

This study aims to determine nursing students' attitudes towards public health nursing courses and professional image and to explore the relationship between these two attitudes.

Research Questions

What is the level of nursing students' attitudes toward the theoretical component of the public health nursing course?

What is the level of nursing students' attitudes toward the practical component of the public health nursing course?

What is the level of nursing students' attitudes toward the professional image of nursing?

Is there a relationship between nursing students' attitudes toward the public health nursing course and the nursing image?

Materials and Methods

Type of Research

This study was conducted as a descriptive-correlational research.

Setting and Time frame of the Research

The research was conducted with students taking the public health nursing course during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic year at a public university located in the western region of Turkey.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised third-year nursing students enrolled in the Nursing Department of a public university in the western region of Turkey (N=56). The sample size was determined to be at least 49 students based on a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05⁽⁹⁾ alpha value. The study aimed to include the entire population, and 51 students voluntarily

participated. However, due to incomplete responses, the surveys of two students were deemed invalid, and the analyses were conducted with data from 49 students.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using the Participants' Personal and Course Information Form, the Public Health Nursing (PHN) Course Attitude Scale, and the Nursing Image Scale (NIS).

Participants' Personal and Course Information Form

This form, developed by the researchers based on the literature,^(3,6) includes nine questions about the participants' age, gender, place of residence, high school background, income level, desire for an academic career, interest in pursuing graduate education in public health, reading Turkish or English articles on public health, and interest in conducting research in the field of public health.

Public Health Nursing (PHN) Course Attitude Scale

Developed by Sapçı in 2017, this scale measures students' attitudes towards the public health nursing course.⁽¹⁰⁾ The scale consists of 34 items scored on a scale of 0–4. It includes two subdimensions: theory and practice. Higher scores in the subdimensions indicate more positive attitudes. The original scale's Cronbach's alpha values were 0.88 for the theoretical subdimension, 0.89 for the practical subdimension, and 0.94 for the overall scale.⁽¹⁰⁾ In this study, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.97 for the theoretical subdimension, 0.98 for the practical subdimension, and 0.98 for the overall scale.

Nursing Image Scale (NIS)

Originally developed as a questionnaire by Özsoy in 2000 and later converted into a scale by Çınar and Demir in 2009 after psychometric analysis, the NIS consists of 28 items.^(8,11) The scale has three subdimensions: General Appearance (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 27), Communication (items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12), and Professional and Educational Qualifications (items 13–28). Items 4, 6, and 27 are reverse scored. The total score ranges from 28 to 84, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards the nursing profession. The original scale's Cronbach's alpha value was 0.81,^(8,11) and in this study, it was found to be 0.89.

Data Collection

Data were collected through self-reported surveys after the completion of the public health nursing course during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. A survey invitation containing a link to an online questionnaire was shared with the students via their class WhatsApp group, emphasizing that participation was entirely voluntary.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 software, with the skewness and kurtosis values falling between -2 and +2, indicating that the data were normally distributed.⁽¹²⁾ Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum-maximum values, frequencies, and percentages, were used. Relationships between total scale scores were examined using Pearson correlation tests, with statistical significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, institutional approval was secured from the university where the research was conducted, and ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences (dated 21/02/2023, decision number 28/18). The research was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration's principles, and all phases of the investigation were conducted in accordance with the Research and Publication Ethics guidelines.

Results

Table 1. The Personal and Course-Related Characteristics of the Students (n=49)

Characteristics		\bar{X}^i	SD ⁱⁱ
Age (Mean±SD)		21.53	1.27
Characteristics		n	%
Gender	Female	35	71.40
	Male	14	28.60
The Place Where Most of Life Was Spent	Metropolitan/City	32	65.30
	District	10	20.40
	Village	7	14.30
Type of High School Graduated	Vocational Health High School	6	12.20
	Other High Schools	43	87.80
Income Status	Income less than expenses	6	12.20
	Income equal to expenses	38	77.60
	Income more than expenses	5	10.20
Considering an Academic Career	Yes	32	65.30
	No	17	34.70
Considering Pursuing Postgraduate Education in Public Health Nursing	Yes	18	36.70
	No	31	63.30

Table 1. The Personal and Course-Related Characteristics of the Students (n=49) (Continue)

Reading Turkish or English Articles Related to Public Health Nursing	Yes	25	51.00
	No	24	49.00
Willingness to Conduct Scientific Research Related to Public Health Nursing	Yes	27	55.10
	No	22	44.90
Total:		49	100

Abbreviations: \bar{X}^i : Arithmetic Mean SD^{ii} : Standard Deviation

The average age of the participating students was 21.53 ± 1.27 , and 71.4% were female. Among the students, 65.3% had spent most of their lives in metropolitan or urban areas, 12.2% graduated from vocational health high schools, and 77.6% reported income equal to expenses. Additionally, 65.3% of the students considered pursuing an academic career, 36.7% expressed interest in pursuing postgraduate education in public health nursing, 51% reported reading Turkish or English articles related to public health nursing, and 55.1% were interested in conducting scientific research in public health nursing (Table 1).

Table 2. The Average Scores of Students on the Public Health Nursing (PHN) Course Attitude Scale and the Nursing Image Scale (NIS)

Scale	Number of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maksimum
PHN Course Attitude Scale - Theoretical Subdimension	17	2.50	0.99	0	4
PHN Course Attitude Scale - Practical Subdimension	17	2.64	1.06	0	4
Nursing Image Scale (NIS) Total	28	72.95	7.64	55	82
NIS General Appearance Subdimension	7	16.10	1.59	13	19
NIS Communication Subdimension	6	15.55	2.17	11	18
NIS Professional and Educational Qualifications Subdimension	15	41.30	4.99	30	45

The students scored an average of 2.50 ± 0.99 on the theoretical subdimension and 2.64 ± 1.06 on the practical subdimension of the Public Health Nursing (PHN) Course Attitude Scale. On the Nursing Image Scale (NIS), the students scored an average of 72.95 ± 7.64 overall, with subdimension scores of 16.10 ± 1.59 for General Appearance, 15.55 ± 2.17 for Communication, and 41.30 ± 4.99 for Professional and Educational Qualifications (Table 2).

Table 3. The Correlation Between Students' Scores on the Public Health Nursing (PHN) Course Attitude Scale and the Nursing Image Scale (NIS)

Variables		PHN Course Attitude Scale - Theoretical Subdimension	PHN Course Attitude Scale - Practical Subdimension
NIS Total	r ⁱ	0.325	0.294
	p ⁱⁱ	0.023*	0.040*
NIS General Appearance	r ⁱ	0.326	0.285
	p ⁱⁱ	0.022*	0.047*
NIS Communication Subdimension	r ⁱ	0.187	0.177
	p ⁱⁱ	0.197	0.223
NIS Professional and Educational Qualifications Subdimension	r ⁱ	0.312	0.282
	p ⁱⁱ	0.029*	0.050*

Abbreviations: rⁱ: Pearson Correlation Analysis, *pⁱⁱ≤0.05

A moderate positive correlation was found between the theoretical and practical subdimension scores of the PHN Course Attitude Scale and the total, General Appearance, and Professional and Educational Qualifications subdimension scores of the NIS ($p \leq 0.05$) (Table 3).

Discussion

The delivery of healthcare services has increasingly shifted from clinical settings to community-based approaches. Similarly, nursing care is transitioning from individual-focused to community-centered care. This shift underscores the growing need for nurses equipped with public health nursing knowledge and skills, who understand the importance of community-based care and are willing to work with communities.⁽¹³⁾ A study involving first-year nursing students found that the vast majority preferred clinical fields, viewing public health nursing as distant from caregiving roles.⁽¹⁴⁾

Public health nursing courses in undergraduate nursing education are critical for instilling knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to public health nursing. Additionally, the nursing profession's image in society plays a crucial role in promoting and protecting public health. Nurses' positive attitudes toward their professional image are essential for shaping a favorable societal perception of the profession.^(6,15) In this study, students demonstrated moderate attitudes towards the public health nursing course, with higher scores for the practical subdimension compared to the theoretical subdimension. Similar findings have been reported in a study conducted in eastern Turkey, where students exhibited moderate attitudes toward

public health nursing courses, with more favorable attitudes towards the practical component.⁽⁶⁾ Another study from southern Turkey found similar levels of attitudes towards theoretical and practical components, with moderate overall attitudes towards public health nursing courses.⁽³⁾ Despite the challenges posed by the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, which necessitated online delivery of the course in this study, students' attitudes remained consistent with the literature. The higher scores for the practical subdimension may be attributed to the teaching methods employed by the instructors, who encouraged students to provide health education to various groups in their localities. Instructors provided one-on-one mentoring during the preparation of health education materials and ensured the process was documented. These findings suggest that online delivery of public health nursing courses can be effective when complemented by active learning methods for the practical component.

The professional image of nursing is significant as it influences the attitudes and behaviors of members of the profession. A positive professional image among nurses, who are integral to protecting and promoting public health, enhances job commitment and service performance.⁽¹⁶⁾ In this study, students demonstrated high levels of positive attitudes towards the nursing image. Similar findings have been reported in other studies conducted in different regions of Turkey.⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾

Positive attitudes toward the nursing image among students are crucial for the advancement of the profession and its recognition in society. Determining students' attitudes before graduation is important for guiding future interventions. The findings of this study, along with similar results from Çakıcı (2021), highlight the critical role of undergraduate nursing education in positively shaping students' professional image.⁽¹⁷⁾

A unique aspect of this study is its investigation of the relationship between attitudes toward public health nursing courses and the nursing image. A moderate positive correlation was identified, suggesting that education and practices related to public health nursing can enhance the professional image of nursing by imparting knowledge, skills, professional responsibilities, and an understanding of the profession's importance within the healthcare team.⁽²⁰⁾

Given the increasing emphasis on community-based healthcare delivery and the growing need for public health nurses, the findings of this study are significant. It is recommended that public health nursing courses be viewed as an opportunity for advancing community-based nursing practices and improving the nursing image in society. Universities

can prepare future professional nurses ready to meet societal needs by implementing public health nursing courses in a manner that positively influences students' attitudes.

Results and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study found that nursing students exhibited moderate attitudes toward the public health nursing course and high attitudes toward the nursing image after completing the course online. A moderate positive correlation was observed between these two attitudes. These findings highlight the significance of public health nursing courses in undergraduate nursing education, both for promoting community-based care and for enhancing the professional image of nursing.

Given the established relationship between students' attitudes toward the course and the nursing image, it is recommended that educators implement strategies to reinforce both. To strengthen students' attitudes toward the course, educational opportunities should allow them to actively engage in public health nursing roles across diverse populations. In this context, the use of simulations providing interactive, case-based learning may be particularly beneficial. To improve the professional image of nursing, educators should emphasize the societal impact of nursing interventions, facilitate engagement with role model nurses, and promote student involvement in community-based health initiatives. These approaches may contribute not only to more favorable attitudes toward public health nursing education but also to the cultivation of a stronger, more positive professional identity among future nurses.

Limitation

The study's generalizability is limited by the fact that it was conducted with students from a single university. Furthermore, the remote delivery of the spring semester during the 2022–2023 academic year necessitated by the earthquakes in Turkey and the use of online data collection methods represent additional limitations.

Conflict of Interests

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Source of Institutional and Financial Support

No institutional or financial support was received.

Author contributions

Idea/Concept (EA, CBO, AE), Study Design (EA, CBO, AE), Data Collection (EA, CBO), Data Analysis and Interpretation (EA, CBO, AE), Literature Review (EA, CBO, AE), Manuscript Writing (EA, CBO, AE), Final Review Before Submission (EA, CBO, AE).

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