

Determining the Relationship Between Perceptions of the Nursing Profession and Attitudes Towards Career Future of Nursing Senior Students: An Observational Study

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Abstract

This investigation aimed to explore the correlation between the perceptions of nursing senior students regarding the nursing profession and their outlook on their future career prospects. The study sample for this descriptive and relationship-seeking research comprised 143 senior students enrolled in the nursing department of a university. The research was finalized with the participation of 105 students who satisfied the inclusion criteria and provided their consent. It was ascertained that Career Future Inventory (CFI) scores exhibited notable variations based on the students' gender, preparedness for the nursing profession, and their post-graduate employment status. The research revealed a substantial positive correlation among the CFI scale's overall score, the sub-dimensions of career adaptability and career optimism, and the total score of the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS). Furthermore, the sub-dimensions of age, gender, post-graduation work plan, and PNPS were identified as the contributing factors explaining 53.7% of the variation in the students' career plans. The study revealed that the students' perceptions of the status and the

quality of the nursing profession were significant factors influencing their career plans. Consequently, it is essential to focus on fostering a positive professional perception among students by incorporating professional values and ethics into nursing education. By doing so, we can positively influence their attitudes towards the nursing profession and, in turn, enhance their career aspirations.

Keywords: Career Future Plan, Nursing, Professional Perception, Professional Qualities, Professional Statute.

Perception is the mental representation and understanding formed by an individual through a combination of knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. On the other hand, a profession encompasses all the occupations acquired through an extensive and rigorous education process, with clearly defined boundaries guided by ethical rules and principles (Glerean et al., 2017; Şen et al., 2021). Occupational perception can be profoundly influenced by numerous factors, including cultural norms, the level of societal development, political dynamics, and the overall welfare environment. These elements

play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive and understand various occupations and professions within a given society (Şen et al., 2021). Hence, each profession holds its distinct perception in every country. Consequently, it becomes essential for individuals selecting their profession to make a conscious and informed decision, equipping themselves with comprehensive knowledge about their chosen field and pursuing it passionately to contribute to its advancement and elevate its status (Sönmez et al., 2019).

The way individuals feel and think about nursing, as well as their perceptions of themselves and the environment they work in, play a vital role in shaping their overall perception of the nursing profession (Avcı Çetin et al., 2019; Mollaoğlu and Yanmış, 2019). Professional perception encompasses a multifaceted understanding that nursing students have about themselves, their surroundings, and their chosen profession. It involves their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives regarding various aspects of nursing. (Avcı Çetin et al., 2019, Kabanya and Mwaniki, 2016). The way nursing students perceive their chosen profession plays a significant

role in influencing their decisions to continue their education in nursing, pursue their career in the field, and shape their long-term career plans. (Apaydın Cırık et al., 2022; Ayaz Alkaya, 2018).

A career encompasses the continuous and purposeful journey of an individual's personal and professional growth. It involves acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities through education, training, and experiences, which empowers them to pursue their aspirations and ambitions successfully (Karadaş et al., 2017). Career planning involves a thoughtful and systematic process of self-evaluation, exploration, and goal-setting to map out the desired progression in one's professional journey. It is a proactive approach to managing and shaping one's career path, driven by self-awareness and a clear understanding of personal strengths, interests, values, and aspirations (Bektemür et al., 2016, Kavurmacı et al., 2021). Absolutely, career planning is of paramount importance for both student and graduate nurses, just as it is in all sectors. In the nursing profession, having a well-thought-out career plan can significantly impact an individual's personal and professional development, job satisfaction, and overall success in their chosen career path (Kalafat, 2012; Waddell et al., 2015; Yücel Çınar et al., 2011). Engaging in career planning during their education offers numerous benefits that contribute to their success and growth as nursing professionals (Avcı Çetin et al., 2019, Glerean et

al., 2017, Kavurmacı et al., 2021, Waddell et al., 2015).

The perception of the nursing profession can significantly influence various aspects of nurse candidates' personal and professional development, including their motivation, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships. A positive perception may lead them to set ambitious career goals within nursing, such as pursuing advanced degrees, specialized certifications, or leadership roles. When the literature is examined, some studies include nursing profession perception and career planning (Apaydın Cırık et al., 2022, Atefi et al., 2014, Avcı Çetin et al., 2019, Ayaz Alkaya, 2018, Ingersoll et al., 2002; Sönmez et al., 2019). Despite the importance of understanding the relationship between nursing profession perception and career planning in nursing students, the existing studies on this subject are relatively limited. Accordingly, this research was undertaken with the purpose of establishing the correlation between the perceptions of nursing senior students regarding the nursing profession and their attitudes concerning their future career paths.

Research questions

- (1) What are the students' perceptions of the nursing profession?
- (2) What are the students' career plans regarding the nursing profession?

- (3) Do students' perceptions of the nursing profession affect their career plans?

Methods

Type of Research

This study is a descriptive and relationship-seeking research endeavor designed to investigate the correlation between nursing senior students' perceptions of the nursing profession and their attitudes concerning their future career trajectories.

Population and Sample of the Research

The study's population, or universe, included 143 senior nursing students enrolled in the health sciences faculty of a university during the academic year 2021-2022. The inclusion criteria for sampling in this study were as follows: being enrolled in the health sciences faculty as a senior nursing student during the 2021-2022 academic year, actively pursuing continuing education at the faculty during the data collection period, and willingly volunteering to participate in the study.

Participants whose data collection forms were incompletely filled, those who expressed a lack of willingness to participate, and those who were absent during the study period were excluded from the research. The sample selection employed an appropriate sampling method.

However, 28 students who were yet to graduate, 4 who expressed a lack of willingness to participate, and 6 who incompletely filled in the scales were excluded from the study. The research concluded with the active participation of 105 senior nursing students. To report the study's findings and methodology, the researchers utilized the STROBE checklist, a standardized tool ensuring transparent and comprehensive reporting of observational studies.

Data Collection

The data for the study were collected during the period between May 1, 2022, and May 31, 2022, following the acquisition of all required permissions. Three instruments were employed to gather the study's data: the Personal Information Form (PIF), the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS), and the Career Future Inventory (CFI). The PIF was utilized to ascertain students' descriptive characteristics, the PNPS to assess their professional perceptions, and the CFI to determine their career future attributes. The data collection tools were thoroughly explained to the students, and their informed consent was sought before proceeding. The data collection process was conducted in person, and the students were requested to read and complete the data collection forms under the researchers' guidance.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form (PIF)

This form comprises eight questions that were meticulously crafted by the researcher, drawing upon relevant literature (Kalafat, 2012; Yücel Çınar et al., 2011). These questions aim to discern essential characteristics of the students, including age, gender, and their career preferences.

Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS)

The data collection tool utilized in this study was the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS), developed by Eşer et al. in 2004. The PNPS comprises two sub-dimensions: "Professional Qualities" (17 items) with a score range of 17 to 85, and "Professional Statute" (5 items) with a score range of 5 to 25. These sub-dimensions encompass various statements that describe different aspects of the nursing profession. The scale consists of a total of 22 Likert-type items. A higher total score obtained from the scale (ranging from 22 to 110) indicates a positive perception of the nursing profession (Eşer et al., 2004). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the PNPS was found to be 0.89, indicating good internal consistency and reliability of the scale.

Career Future Inventory (CFI)

The scale used in this study to assess individuals' positive career planning attitudes was initially developed by Rottinghaus et al. in 2005. Kalafat conducted the validity and reliability study of this scale in 2012 (Kalafat, 2012; Rottinghaus et al., 2005). The scale comprises a total of 25 items and is organized into three sub-dimensions: career adaptability, career optimism, and perceived knowledge. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study's scale was determined to be 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. This suggests that the scale is a reliable tool for evaluating individuals' positive career planning attitudes in the context of this research.

Statistical Analysis

The research data were subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS v24.0 software package. The normal distribution of the data was assessed utilizing the Shapiro-Wilk test and histogram graphics. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the students. To compare the students' socio-demographic characteristics and the scores obtained from the scales, T-test and one-way ANOVA were utilized. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the scales. To identify the factors influencing career

plans, stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was employed. The statistical significance was determined based on the criterion of $P < 0.05$.

Results

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participating students. The mean age of the students was found to be 22.62 ± 2.05 , with 82.9% of them being female. Regarding academic performance, 58.1% of the students had an academic grade point average ranging from 2.00 to 2.99. Regarding their perceptions and career plans, 75.2% of the students expressed a liking for the nursing department. Additionally, 82.9% of the students reported feeling prepared for their future profession as nurses, and 81.9% expressed a desire to work as nurses after graduation. When asked about the reasons for choosing the nursing department, 46.7% of the students stated that employment opportunities played a significant role in their decision. Moreover, 62.9% of the students mentioned that they had not participated in any activities related to career planning (Table 1).

The research findings revealed that the students' average total score on the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) was 91.0 ± 12.48 , indicating a positive perception of the nursing profession. Similarly, the Career Futures Inventory (CFI) total score average was 83.53 ± 7.59 , reflecting positive

career plans among the students. Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was observed between the students' age and their PNPS total score, as well as their professional qualities scores. This suggests that as the students' age increased, their perceptions of the nursing profession and their professional qualities within the field tended to decrease.

The study findings indicated significant differences in the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) total and professional statute scores among students based on their liking for the nursing department. Notably, students who expressed a preference for the nursing department had higher scores in terms of their professional perceptions. Similarly, the Career Futures Inventory (CFI) total scores, career optimism, and perceived knowledge subscale scores exhibited significant differences based on the students' gender. Male students obtained higher CFI scores compared to their female counterparts. Moreover, the professional statute subscale and PNPS total scores varied depending on the students' readiness for the profession. Students who reported feeling prepared for their future career in nursing had significantly higher scores on these scales. Furthermore, the professional qualities subscale and PNPS total scores differed concerning the students' post-graduation study plans. Those who intended to pursue a career in the nursing field obtained significantly

higher scores compared to those considering different career paths. Additionally, significant differences were observed in the CFI total scores and Career Adaptability subscale scores concerning the students' readiness for the profession and post-graduate employment status (Table 1 and Table 2).

Upon examining the relationship between the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) and Career Futures Inventory (CFI) scale total and sub-dimension mean scores, the research revealed noteworthy results. Specifically, a significant positive correlation was found between the CFI scale's career adaptability and career optimism sub-dimensions and its total score, as well as the PNPS occupational statute sub-dimension and the total score. These findings, detailed in Table 1 and Table 2, indicate that higher scores in the CFI career adaptability and career optimism sub-dimensions were associated with an elevated CFI total score. Similarly, a stronger occupational statute perception, as measured by the PNPS occupational statute sub-dimension, was positively correlated with higher PNPS total scores. These positive correlations suggest that students with greater career adaptability, optimism, and perception of their occupational statute tend to exhibit more positive overall perceptions of the nursing profession, as reflected in their PNPS scores.

In the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the Career Futures Inventory (CFI) scale

Table 1

Disparities in Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) and Career Futures Inventory (CFI) Score Based on Students' Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics (N=105)

Variables	n (%)	Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS)					
		Professional Qualities		Professional Statute		Total Mean (SD)	t/F/r
		Mean (SD)	t/F/r	Mean (SD)	t/F/r		
Age, Mean ±SD	22.62 ±2.05	74.19(9.65)	-,265**	19.91(2.81)	-.039	91.06(12.48)	r =-,211*
Gender							
Female	87 (82.9)	74.37(9.70)	=.439	19.81(2.85)	t=-.785	91.06(12.74)	t=.107
Male	18 (17.1)	73.27(9.65)	p=.662	20.38(2.59)	p=.434	90.72(11.46)	p=.915
Academic Achievement Level (0-4)							
2-2.99	61 (58.1)	73.14(10.06)	t=-1.308	19.60(2.80)	t=-1.325	90.52(13.01)	t=-.467
≥3	44 (41.9)	75.63(8.97)	p=.194	20.34(2.80)	p=.188	91.68(11.81)	p=.641
Reason for Choosing the Nursing Department							
Voluntarily	48 (47.7)	75.52(10.36)	F=1.026	20.81(2.63)	F=5.089	92.58(14.11)	F=1.266
Family's Preference	8 (7.6)	75.0(6.54)	p=.362	19.75(2.05)	p=.008	94.0(6.74)	p=.286
Due to Job Opportunities	49 (46.7)	72.75(9.30)		19.06(2.86)		88.97(11.29)	
Love for Nursing							
Yes	79 (75.2)	75.32(9.13)	F=2.900	20.30(2.75)	F=3.214	92.49(12.20)	F=3.027
No	13 (12.4)	68.69(12.5)	p=.060	18.84(3.33)	p=.044	83.69(14.24)	p=.043
Indecisive	13 (12.4)	72.76(8.07)		18.61(2.02)		89.30(10.16)	
Readiness for Nursing Profession							
Yes	87 (82.9)	75.01(8.26)	t=1.373	20.22(2.73)	t=2.597	92.41(11.05)	t=2.604
No	18 (17.1)	70.22(14.30)	p=.185	18.38(2.74)	p=.011	84.22(15.59)	p=.011
Post-Graduation Plan							
Nursing	86 (81.9)	74.60(9.61)	F=3.608	19.77(2.64)	F=2.368	92.13(12.46)	F=5.705
Nurse Educator	17 (16.2)	74.176(6.94)	p=.031	20.94(3.45)	p=.099	88.41(8.27)	p=.004
Non-nursing Profession	2 (1.9)	56.50(20.50)		17.0(0.00)		64.5(12.26)	
Participation in Career Planning Activity							
Yes	39 (37.1)	75.87(10.02)	t=1.377	20.84(2.69)	t=2.688	92.25(13.7)	t=.785
No	66 (62.9)	73.19(9.36)	p=.171	19.36(2.75)	p=.008	90.27(11.73)	p=.434

SD: standard deviation
 PNPS, Perception of Nursing Professional Scale; CFI, Career Futures Inventory.

Table 2

The Association between Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) and Career Futures Inventory (CFI) Scores (N=105)

Variables	Career Futures Inventory (CFI)							
	Career Adaptability		Career Optimism		Perceived Knowledge		CFI Total	
	Mean (SD)	t/F/r	Mean (SD)	t/F/r	Mean (SD)	t/F/r	Mean (SD)	t/F/r
Age	39.27(5.08)	r=-.005	35.56(3.38)	r=-.119	8.69(1.86)	r=-.183	83.53(7.59)	r=-.101
Professional Qualities		r=.164		r=.155		r=-.101		r=.154
Professional Statute		r=,747**		r=,322**		r=.127		r=,675**
PNPS- Total		r=,195*		r=,220*		r=-.040		r=,219*
Gender								
Female	38.97(4.95)	t=-1.331	35.16(2.74)	t=-1.847p	8.39(1.61)	t=-3.933	82.52(6.69)	t= -2.427a
Male	40.72(5.56)	p= 0.186	37.5(5.22)		10.16(2.28)	p= <.001	88.38(9.78)	p=.025
Academic Achievement Level (0-4)								
2-2.99	38.85(4.57)	t=-1.006	35.49(3.73)	t=-0.249	8.72(2.05)	t=0.168	83.06(7.75)	t= -0.742
≥3	39.86(5.71)	p= 0.317	35.65(2.88)	p= 0.804	8.65(1.56)	p= 0.867	84.18(7.39)	p= 0.46
Reason for Choosing the Nursing Department								
Voluntarily	40.89(5.06)	F=5.65	35.33(2.57)	F=0.972	8.33(1.43)	F=1.782	84.56(6.56)	F= 0.866
Family's Preference	39.87(4.05)	p= 0.005	34.37(2.19)	p= 0.382	9.25(1.83)	p= 0.173	83.5(4.47)	p= 0.424
Due to Job Opportunities	37.59(4.78)		35.97(4.15)		8.95(2.17)		82.53(8.81)	
Love for Nursing								
Yes	40.01(5.03)	F=3.702	35.32(3.25)	F=1.506	8.46(1.65)	F=3.634	83.81(7.28)	F= 0.341
No	36.46(3.84)	p= 0.028	37.07(4.31)	p= 0.227	9.92(2.66)	p= 0.03	83.46(8.87)	p= 0.712
Indecisive	37.61(5.37)		35.46(3.01)		8.84(1.77)		81.92(8.54)	
Readiness for Nursing Profession								
Yes	39.77(5.05)	t=2.231	35.63(3.64)	t=0.725	8.8(1.83)	t=1.471	84.21(7.85)	t= 2.064 a
No	36.88(4.63)	p= 0.028	35.22(1.73)	p= 0.471	8.11(1.90)	p= 0.144	80.22(5.15)	p= 0.042
Post-Graduation Plan								
Nursing	39.29(4.93)	F=3.441	35.62(3.29)	F=2.359	8.68(1.79)	F=3.553	83.60(7.28)	F= 5.952 a
Nurse Educator	40.23(5.26)	p= 0.036	35.82(3.48)	p= 0.1	9.11(1.96)	p= 0.032	85.17(7.12)	p= 0.004
Non-nursing Profession	30.5(0.70)		30.5(4.94)		5.5(0.70)		66.5(6.36)	
Participation in Career Planning Activity								
Yes	40.64(5.35)	t=2.152	35.5(3.61)	t=103	8.92(1.84)	t=103	85.15(7.47)	t=1.696
No	38.46(4.76)	p= 0.034	35.54(3.27)	p= 0.949	8.56(1.87)	p= 0.337	82.57(7.55)	p= 0.093

^a p < .05; SD: standard deviation

PNPS, Perception of Nursing Professional Scale; CFI, Career Futures Inventory

and its sub-dimensions were considered dependent variables. The analysis was conducted in two steps. In the first step, variables such as age, gender, job readiness status, and post-graduation work plan were included in the model. In the second step, the PNPS professional statute and PNPS professional qualities were added to the model. The results of the analysis revealed that gender, post-graduation work plan, and the PNPS professional statute subscale significantly influenced the CFI total scores. The model generated from the regression analysis was statistically significant ($p < .001$), and the variables included in the model accounted for 53.7% of the variance (Adjusted R-squared = 0.537). Notably, the PNPS professional statute level emerged as a critical factor affecting the CFI scores. The addition of the PNPS professional statute subscale to the model resulted in a substantial increase of 37.3% (R-squared change = 0.373) in the variance explained by the model. These findings highlight the significance of the students' gender, post-graduation work plan, and their perception of the professional statute (as measured by the PNPS) in predicting their career scores as assessed by the CFI scale and its sub-dimensions.

In the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, Career Adaptability scores were found to be significantly influenced by the variables of occupational plan and PNPS-Professional Statute. The model created from this analysis accounted for

56.3% of the variance in Career Adaptability scores (Adjusted R-squared = 0.563). Similarly, Career Optimism scores were significantly affected by gender and PNPS-Professional Statute. The model for Career Optimism explained 15.3% of the variance (Adjusted R-squared = 0.153). Moreover, in the analysis of Perceived Knowledge sub-dimension scores, age, vocational plan, and PNPS-Professional Qualities sub-dimension emerged as significant variables. These factors accounted for 21.1% of the variance in Perceived Knowledge scores (Adjusted R-squared = 0.211).

Regarding the effects of individual variables on the model, age, gender, and post-graduation study plan were found to significantly influence the model. Specifically, Perceived Knowledge about the job market increased as age decreased, and male students exhibited more positive career planning attitudes compared to female students. Additionally, students who expressed a desire to work in a profession other than nursing had lower career planning attitudes when compared to those who aspired to work in the nursing field. These results provide valuable insights into the factors that affect Career Adaptability, Career Optimism, and Perceived Knowledge among the students, which can be utilized to develop strategies for enhancing their career planning attitudes and decisions.

Furthermore, the variables of PNPS professional statute and

PNPS professional qualities were also found to significantly impact the model. Specifically, students with a higher perception of the professional statute demonstrated a more positive attitude toward career planning. On the other hand, students with a lower perception of professional qualities exhibited a greater understanding of the job market, as reflected in their higher Perceived Knowledge scores (as presented in Table 3).

These findings underscore the importance of students' perceptions of the professional statute and professional qualities in shaping their career planning attitudes and awareness about the job market. Developing a strong and positive perception of the nursing profession and fostering essential professional qualities can play a crucial role in enhancing students' career planning decisions and aspirations.

Discussion

In this research, which explored the perceptions of senior nursing students regarding the nursing profession and their attitudes toward their career future, it was found that the students held positive perceptions of their profession and had optimistic career plans. These positive findings contrast with the results of other studies, such as Yücel Çınar et al. (2011), where the perception of the profession was reported to be at a moderate level. Additionally, studies conducted by Apaydın Cırık et al. (2022) and Sönmez et al. (2019) revealed high

Table 3

Significant Factors Influencing Nursing Students' Career Future Plans: Outcomes of Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N=105)

Dependant Variable	Step	Independent Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95 % CI Lower-Upper	Model	
CFI Total	1	Gender	-5.229	1.841	-.261	-2.840	.005	-8.882- -1.577	F= 5.877	
		Non-nursing profession	-15.116	5.192	-.273	-2.912	.004	-25.416- -4.816	$p<.001$ R ² Ch.= .190	
	2	Gender	-4.690	1.369	-.234	-3.425	.001	-7.407- -1.972	F=21.113	
		Non-nursing profession PNPS-Professional Statute	-11.599 1.753	3.936 .193	-.210 .649	-2.947 9.105	.004 .000	-19.410- -3.788 1.371- 2.135	$p<.001$ R ² Ch= .373	
Overall model									Adj.R ² =0.537	
CA	1	Non-nursing profession	-8.680	3.648	-.235	-2.379	.019	-15.917- -1.442	F=3.000 $p<.001$ R ² Ch= .107	
		Non-nursing profession PNPS-Professional Statute	-5.843 1.325	2.560 .125	-.158 .733	-2.282 10.580	.025 .000	-10.924- -.762 1.076- 1.573	F=23.292 $p<.001$ R ² Ch= .481	
	Overall model									Adj.R ² =0.563
	CO	1	Gender	-2.366	.859	-.265	-2.756	.007	-4.070- -.663	F=3.262 $p<.001$ R ² Ch.=.115
Gender PNPS- Professional Statut			-2.301 .353	.826 .116	-.257 .293	-2.785 3.038	.006 .003	-3.941- -.661 .122- .583	F=4.143 $p<.001$ R ² Ch= .087	
Overall model									Adj. R ² = .153	
PK		1	Gender	-1.768	.446	-.360	-3.961	.000	-2.654- -.883	F=6.544 $p<.001$ R ² Ch= .207
	Age Gender Non-nursing profession PNPS-Professional Qualities		-.192 -1.683 -2.708 -.045	.085 .438 1.260 .018	-.212 -.342 -.200 -.234	-2.261 -3.839 -2.150 -2.442	.026 .000 .034 .016	-3.360- -.023 -2.552- -.813 -5.208- -.208 -.082- -.008	F=5.627 $p<.001$ R ² Ch=.049	
	Overall model									Adj. R ² =.211

PNPS, Perception of Nursing Professional Scale; CFI, Career Futures Inventory. CA= Career Adaptability; CO Career Optimism; PK=Perceived Knowledge; R² Ch.= R² Changed; SE: Standart Error, β : Standardized Beta, CI: Confidence Interval. Adj R²: Adjusted R².

job image scores among students. However, Taşkın Yılmaz et al. (2014) reported a negative image of nursing in their study.

In our research, the positive perception of nursing and the optimistic career plans among the students are attributed to the internalization of professional values received during their nursing education. It is believed that the emphasis on professional values during their education positively influenced their perceptions of the nursing profession and career plans. The study's outcomes suggest that fostering and instilling these professional values in nursing education can contribute significantly to shaping students' perceptions and attitudes toward their future careers in nursing.

Career planning is considered a strategic approach that commences with career choice and necessitates continuous development throughout the education process (Akman Yılmaz et al., 2016; Avcı Çetin et al., 2019). In this study, a positive and significant correlation was identified between the total score and sub-dimensions of the Career Futures Inventory (CFI) scale and the total score and sub-dimensions of the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS). Similarly, other studies conducted by Mollaoğlu and Yanmış (2019) and Şen et al. (2021) have also reported a relationship between the PNPS and CFI total scores.

Based on these findings, it can be inferred that as students' positive perception of the nursing

profession increases, their career planning attitudes and aspirations also tend to elevate. This suggests that cultivating a favorable and constructive perception of the nursing profession can positively impact students' career planning decisions and motivations for their future in nursing. Thus, emphasizing the importance of positive professional perceptions during nursing education can be a valuable strategy for nurturing proactive career planning among nursing students.

Our research revealed that gender significantly influences Career Futures Inventory (CFI) scores, with male students displaying more positive career-planning attitudes compared to female students. This finding contrasts with the studies conducted by Sönmez et al. (2019) and Avcı Çetin et al. (2019), where CFI scores did not exhibit significant differences based on gender. Conversely, in the study conducted by Karadaş et al. (2017), variations in CFI sub-dimension scores were evident between genders.

The inclination of male students to consider nursing as a viable career choice, in contrast to their female counterparts, appears to be a prevalent trend within the population. It is conceivable that this tendency stems from societal perceptions seeking to challenge the notion that nursing is a profession more suited to women.

This gender-based disparity in career-planning attitudes underscores the importance of addressing prevailing gender

biases and stereotypes related to certain professions. Promoting diversity and inclusivity in career choices, including nursing, can be instrumental in dismantling these misconceptions and fostering a supportive environment that empowers all students, regardless of gender, to pursue their desired career paths.

Another crucial aspect that can significantly influence career choice in nursing is the perceived status of the nursing profession within different professions, specifically its social value (Glerean et al., 2017). In our study, we found that the occupational statute sub-dimension of the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) significantly contributed to explaining students' career future plans, with students who possessed a high perception of the occupational statute exhibiting more positive career planning attitudes (as presented in Table 3).

In the study conducted by Atefi et al. (2014), it was highlighted that nurses' interactions with other health professionals play a vital role in their job satisfaction. Moreover, professional development opportunities and the establishment of career advancement programs were identified as contributing factors to nurses' job satisfaction. Furthermore, Glerean et al. (2017) emphasized that young individuals' perceptions of the nursing profession are influenced by factors such as their relatives, friends, media representations,

and influential figures in their lives. These findings collectively underscore the significance of the social perception and status of the nursing profession, as well as the role of interactions with other healthcare professionals and opportunities for career growth, in shaping students' career plans and job satisfaction in the nursing field. Addressing these factors can contribute to creating a supportive and fulfilling environment for nurses, thus fostering a positive outlook on their chosen career path.

Nurses must possess a keen awareness of their professional qualities to provide high-quality services that honor individuals' uniqueness, integrity, values, and choices (Ayaz Alkaya, 2018). In our study, we found that students with lower perceptions of the nursing profession's quality demonstrated higher knowledge scores about the job market. Other studies (Glrean et al., 2017; Şen et al., 2021) have similarly reported that the perception of both students and employees toward the nursing profession is negatively affected by society's undervaluation of nursing.

In this research, we hypothesize that students with lower professional perception may closely monitor the job markets to compensate for their perceived shortcomings or to actively explore potential opportunities after graduation. The motivation to improve their perception of professional qualifications or to proactively follow job markets could be driving this behavior

among such students.

The outcomes of this study highlight the significance of nurturing a positive and valued perception of the nursing profession among students to elevate their sense of professional qualities and commitment to providing exceptional care. Fostering a positive image of nursing within society is also vital in attracting and retaining skilled individuals in the nursing profession..

The positive attitudes of nursing students toward their department, their readiness for the nursing profession, and their aspiration to work in nursing-related fields after graduation are factors that have been consistently reported to positively influence both their professional perception and career plans (Akman Yılmaz et al., 2016; Apaydın Cırık et al., 2022).

In our study, a majority of the students expressed a fondness for the nursing department, felt well-prepared for their future profession, and indicated their desire to work as nurses following graduation. These findings align with similar results obtained in other studies (Akman Yılmaz et al., 2016; Karadaş et al., 2017; Yücel Çınar et al., 2011).

The positive perceptions of nursing among the students in our study appear to stem from the gratification they experience in providing care, where they can put their theoretical knowledge into practical skills during clinical practices. The opportunity to engage in hands-on caregiving and

apply their learning in real-life scenarios seems to reinforce their positive outlook on the nursing profession and further enhances their motivation for their future career plans in nursing.

The study revealed that individuals who harbor a genuine affection for the nursing department and feel fully prepared for their future profession exhibit higher scores on both the Nursing Profession Perception Scale (PNPS) and Career Futures Inventory (CFI). Additionally, those who express a desire to work as a nurse after graduation demonstrate a higher perception of the nursing profession, whereas those aspiring to work as academicians obtain higher career scores (as presented in Table 1).

These findings are well-supported by existing studies in the literature (Avcı Çetin et al., 2019; Ayaz Alkaya, 2018; Sönmez et al., 2019), which align with our research outcomes. The act of providing assistance and care to individuals fosters a sense of spiritual fulfillment, contributing to job satisfaction, and significantly influencing students' professional perceptions and career scores.

Conclusion

In conclusion, nursing students' perceptions of the status and quality of their profession are critical determinants influencing their career planning. As such, institutions that offer nursing education have a significant role to play in shaping positive

nursing perceptions and fostering well-informed career plans among their students. To achieve this, it is highly recommended that universities and nursing education providers implement career education programs. These programs can offer valuable guidance and support to nursing students as they navigate their career paths. By participating in such initiatives, students can gain a deeper understanding of the nursing profession, its potential for growth and advancement, and the various opportunities available within the field.

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Authors' Contributions

KKS: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing –original draft, writing –review & editing, visualization, formal analysis, supervision. TA: Conceptualization, methodology, writing –review & editing, formal analysis, visualization, supervision. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

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