

Investigation of Senior Nursing Students' Thoughts towards Their Profession During in COVID-19 Pandemic Period

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Abstract: COVID-19 has affected many countries in the world and has been known as one of the fast-spreading pandemics viruses. This research was carried out to investigate the thoughts of the senior nursing students about their profession during the COVID-19 pandemic period. A cross-sectional methodology of 112 senior nursing students in Turkey participated. The majority students (72.3%) do not think to change their thoughts toward profession after the COVID-19 pandemic even when they get the chance to do. 39.3% of the students stated that they could take care of a patient diagnosed with COVID-19, 34.8% of them were undecided about taking care of the patient and 25.9% of them stated that they could not take care of the patient with COVID-19. The students reported anxiety scores (67.1%) of 5 or more on anxiety levels. Findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic period does not have a negative effect on the thoughts of the nursing students towards their profession. However, the students reported that they lacked information about COVID-19. Can contribute to the use of post-graduate and in-service education opportunities to complete the students' lack of training about COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

In an advanced society, one of the most critical stages of development of an independent individual is choosing her/his own profession¹. The success of an individual in a profession of her/his choice is closely related to choosing with the knowledge of the physical characteristics and conditions of the profession and being mentally ready for that profession². Choosing the nursing profession, which has an important place in the protection, improvement, and development of human health, knowing and demanding by young people is important in forming professional awareness³. Students mostly prefer the nursing profession because of the opportunity to find a job². The nursing profession must be fully implemented and fulfilled to advance the nursing profession and set the highest standard for its status. For this reason, individuals who choose this profession must consciously decide, know and accept the conditions and be passionate about their chosen profession.

The nursing profession is an applied discipline, and students are prepared for the nursing profession by transferring basic knowledge and skills about nursing. During this practice training, student nurses face all the professional risks nurses encounter in the working environment. A study determined that students experience accidents, discomforts and diseases resulting from exposure to professional risks⁴. In addition, nurses are experiencing stressful positions such as intense workload, caring for highly sick and deadly patients, and giving emotional support to patients and their relatives when necessary. Various studies have shown that nursing is a demanding profession and stress from the workplace is common among nurses^{5,6}. In addition to the perception of nursing as a high-risk profession, it seems inevitable that this level of perception will increase in situations such as pandemics in which the whole society is affected.

Pandemic is the general name given to epidemics that spread over a wide area such as a continent or even the entire world⁷. According to World Health Organization definition, a pandemic is the spread of a new disease worldwide⁷. A pandemic indicates that a person-to-person disease spreads to two or more continents, and this spread is continuous⁷.

As of 13 February 2022, data related to the COVID-19 pandemic show 410.565.868 cases and 5.810.880 deaths worldwide⁸. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with its high mortality and morbidity rates due to its sudden, insidious, rapidly progressing, and spreading nature worldwide, humanity has been negatively affected and continues to be affected⁸. In this period, while the entire usual order of life was disrupted, an unexpected extra burden was imposed on health services. Health workers who remain inadequate and helpless under these circumstances have been negatively affected both physiologically and psychologically, especially nurses who maintain health care in close contact⁹⁻¹¹.

Concerning the nursing profession which is perceived as a high-risk and challenging profession, it is inevitable that the negative perceptions will worsen even more during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having strong knowledge and awareness of occupational risks will help nursing students be

Received : 12/02/2021
Received in revised form : 02/27/2022
Accepted : 03/19/2022
Available online : 06/21/2022

Keywords:

COVID-19 pandemic
Nursing student
Profession

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47009/jamp.2022.4.2.10>

Int J Acad Med Pharm,
2022; 4 (2); 47-51



more conscious of protecting themselves while performing the profession and taking necessary safety precautions. In addition, if there are negative attitudes towards the profession, it is possible to plan and implement training targets for changing those attitudes. This research can contribute to the studies on developing and improving the nursing profession. This study aimed to examine the thoughts of the senior nursing students towards their profession during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODS

Study Population and Design

This study is cross-sectional methodology research, and it aims to answer these research questions:

1. Does the COVID-19 pandemic process affect on senior students' thoughts on the nursing profession?
2. Does the COVID-19 pandemic process affect on senior students' attitudes toward the nursing profession?

The research universe consisted of 122 senior students studying at the nursing department of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University in the 2019-2020 academic year. The sample was made up of 112 students (93.3%) who agreed to participate in the study. 67.0% of the students were female, 33.0% were male, and the average age was 22.33 ± 1.16 . It is determined that 30.4% of the students have five or more siblings, and there was an income- expenses equality for the majority of the families (65.2%) in terms of socioeconomic status.

Data Collection Tools

In order to collect data in the research, the "Questionnaire Form," which covered the sociodemographic characteristics of the students and was prepared in line with the literature, was used.

Questionnaire Form: A form consisting of 15 questions prepared by the researcher concerning the literature was used^{2,7,12-18}. The form consisted of questions about students' ages, genders, number of siblings, socioeconomic status of their families, the nursing profession and their thoughts on the COVID-19 pandemic period. **Anxiety Level:** they were asked to evaluate the severity of anxiety they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between 0 (none) and ten scores (the highest).

Collection of Data

The data were collected between 17 April and 17 May 2020 from the last year' students studying in the nursing department of the university in the academic year of 2019-2020 and agreed to participate in the research (n = 112). The questionnaire was conducted using Google Forms, and a request was made to all students to participate in the research online owing to the fact that face-to-face education was not possible at the universities as a result of "stay at home" calls across the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic period at the dates of the study. The senior nursing students did not do clinical training in the hospital at the dates of the study. The clinical training of the students was postponed to the summer semester; and only theoretical lessons were given online via distance education.

Official permission was obtained from the institution to conduct the research. At the same time, ethics committee approval (Decree no: 16.04.2020/10) was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Faculty of Medicine for the ethical compliance of the study.

The data obtained from the study were evaluated by transferring them to the SPSS 22.0 program in a computer environment. Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to evaluate the data.

Limitations of the Research

This research is limited to the reports of students studying in the "Nursing" department in the 2019-2020 academic year at the Faculty of Health Sciences of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University and included in the study only. The senior nursing students did not do clinical

training in the hospital at the dates of the study.

FINDINGS

46.4% of the students participating in the study stated that they preferred the profession due to the guarantee of employment, 58.9% of them are planning to work as a nurse after graduation, and 46.4% felt partly ready for working a nurse. Students reported that the training related to occupational risks (52.7%) and epidemics (52.7%) they got through the education period was partly sufficient (Table 1).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, 83.0% of the students stated that the working conditions of the nurses are burdensome, and 72.3% of them expressed that they do not want to change their profession even though they get a chance to do so. 73.2% of the students consider nursing as a career/future promising profession in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. 39.3% of the participants reported that they could take care of a patient diagnosed with COVID-19, 34.8% were undecided about taking care of the patient, and 25.9% expressed that they could not take care of the patient (Table 2).

When the feelings and opinions of the participant students are evaluated within the COVID-19 pandemic period, the majority think

Table 1. Students' thoughts about profession

Thoughts	n=112	%
The reason to prefer the nursing profession		
Ideal profession	17	5.2
Friends, teachers and family suggestions	23	20.5
Received exam score	20	17.9
Guarantee of employment	52	46.4
Work plan after graduation		
Work as a nurse	66	58.9
Work as an academician	19	17.0
Career in the profession	18	16.1
Receive other vocational training	6	5.3
No plan / opinion	3	2.7
Feeling ready for nursing after graduation		
Feeling ready	36	32.2
Not feeling ready	24	21.4
Partially feeling	52	46.4
Information about occupational risks		
Enough	33	29.5
Partly enough	59	52.7
Insufficient	17	15.1
Not informed at all	3	2.7
Information about epidemic diseases		
Enough	20	17.9
Partly enough	59	52.7
Insufficient	30	26.7
Not informed at all	3	2.7

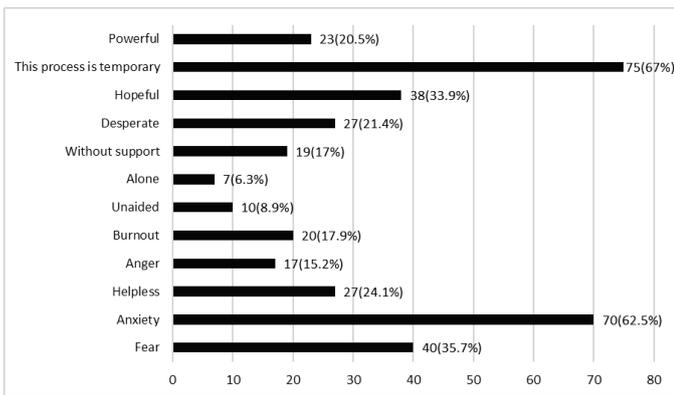
that this period is temporary (67%). It was determined that the most felt emotions were anxiety (62.5%), fear (35.7%), and hopefulness (33.9%) (Fig. 1). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 67.1% of the students reported anxiety scores of 5 or more on anxiety levels. It was determined that the students experience moderate and high severity of anxiety (Fig. 2).

DISCUSSION

In this study, it is seen that the majority of students (46.4%) prefer the nursing profession due to the opportunity to find a job. In the study of Özveren et al.¹⁹, it was determined that 46.3% of the students chose the nursing profession due to the ease of finding a job; the same rate was found to be 44.9% in the study of Kıraç²⁰. In similar studies, it is stated that the nursing profession is preferred because it provides job security and brings a good income economically²¹⁻²⁴. These results reveal that the nursing profession is preferred due to high employment rates, and students perceive the nursing profession as an income-generating job.

Tab. 2. Students' thoughts about the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic process

Thoughts	n=112	%
The thoughts of nurses on working conditions after COVID-19 pandemic		
Very heavy	93	83.0
Not too heavy	6	5.4
Partly too heavy	13	11.6
Wanting to change profession after COVID-19 pandemic		
Wanting	12	10.7
Not wanting	81	72.3
Undecided	19	17.0
Thinking that nursing is a career / promising profession after COVID-19 pandemic		
Yes	82	73.2
No	15	13.4
Undecided	15	13.4
Thinking that can take care of a patient diagnosed with COVID-19		
Yes	44	39.3
No	29	25.9
Undecided	39	34.8



* Since more than one answer was given, n was folded.

Fig.1. Students' feelings and thoughts in the COVID-19 pandemic process

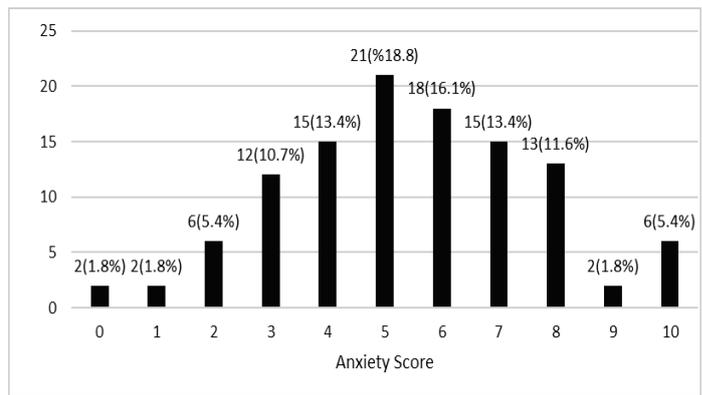


Fig. 2. Students' anxiety level during the COVID-19 pandemic process

In this study, 58.9% of the students reported that they plan to work as a nurse after graduation, and 46.4% stated that they feel partly ready for the nursing profession. The results of our research show similarities to the literature. In various studies, it was determined that students want to work mainly as a nurse after graduation²⁵⁻²⁷. The students reported that their training during the education period related to occupational risks (29.5%) and epidemics (17.9%) was sufficient. This rate is found to be relatively low in our study; students consider the education they receive inadequately. According to the literature review, it was determined that students consider their education insufficient in various studies that evaluate the education quality of nursing students^{26,28}. It is emphasized that getting the opinions of the students about every aspect of the education and evaluation system is important in analyzing the relation between the inputs and outputs of education²⁸. We can say that it is important awareness that students have expectations from education.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, 83.0% of the students stated that the working conditions of the nurses were burdensome, and 72.3% of the students did not want to change their profession even though they had the opportunity. Various studies have shown that nursing is a demanding profession and workplace-related stress is common among nurses^{5,6}. In terms of studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of students who do not want to change their profession was found to be 80.6% in the study of Özveren et al.¹⁹, while the same rate was 55.4% in the study of Bulut et al.²⁹ and 44.2% in the study of Tarhan et al.³⁰ It can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic period does not adversely affect the students' decisions on career choice.

73.2% of students think that nursing after the COVID-19 pandemic is a career/future promising profession. When the studies conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were examined, it can be seen that

nearly half of the participant students (46.2%) consider the future of their profession optimistic in the study of Erbil & Aslan Kaya³¹ while 44.1% of the students are worried about the future of their profession in the study of Karadağ et al.²⁶. In another study conducted by Özveren et al.¹⁹, 21.1% of students reported that nursing was one of their favorite professions according to their opinions. The views of society about nursing have an impact on the nursing profession, profession members, and candidates positively or negatively³². In our study, 73.2% of the students think that nursing is a career/future promising profession, unlike the studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. The comments about the nursing profession in the news and social media channels during the COVID-19 pandemic may have enabled students to think more hopefully and positively about the future of their profession.

In the study, 39.3% of the students stated that they could take care of a patient diagnosed with COVID-19, 34.8% were undecided about taking care of the patient, and 25.9% of them expressed that they could not take care of the patient (Table 2). It is thought that the students did not feel adequate because they did not do clinical training in the hospital at the dates of the study. It is a common situation that students may experience distrust in taking care of patients because of the COVID-19 pandemic which leaves humanity desperate, affects all humanity negatively, and has many unknown aspects as a result of its sudden, insidious, rapidly progressing, and spreading nature all over the World. Therefore, continuing education in the nursing profession has been emphasized from the beginning of the profession until today. As a requirement of lifelong education, in-service training aims to provide employees with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will make them more successful, productive, and happy in their profession³³. In this context, post-graduate in-service training methods can be used.

In the study, it is seen that the majority of participants had the

opinion that this period was temporary (67%) when the feelings and thoughts of the students were evaluated during the COVID-19 pandemic period (Fig.1). The fact that most of students think that this period is temporary is a positive feature in terms of showing their hope for the future. Anxiety (62.5%), fear (35.7%), and hopefulness (33.9%) are among the top three emotions that are experienced. In the study, 67.1% of students reported anxiety scores of 5 or more anxiety levels during the COVID-19 pandemic period (Fig.2). It can be said that students experience moderate and high levels of intense anxiety. It has also been shown in previous studies that the mental health of nurses can be negatively affected in situations such as disasters and pandemics^{34,35}. Similar experiences are also experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic⁹. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was reported that healthcare workers mainly experienced the fear of death, uncertainty anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder^{10,11,36}. In a study on the covid-19 anxiety status of students in vocational schools of health services, approximately one-third of the students had anxiety³⁷.

Conclusion

As a result of the research, it was found that the students prefer the nursing profession due to the opportunity to find a job, while the education provided in the school is unsatisfactory, according to their opinions. This unsatisfactory may be due to the fact that the students did not do clinical training in the hospital at the dates of the study. In addition, they do not want to change their profession, although the working conditions of the nurses after the COVID-19 pandemic were burdensome; in other words, they want to work as a nurse in all possible conditions. It was determined that they experience insecurity in taking care of a patient diagnosed with the COVID-19 and they have the opinion that nursing is a career/future promising profession for the period following the COVID-19 pandemic. Anxiety levels were found to be moderate and high.

In line with these results, it is believed that the COVID-19 pandemic period did not have harm the thoughts of the senior nursing students towards their profession. It is thought that it will be beneficial to organize the curriculum of the schools that provide nursing education in a way to increase the quality of education by considering the opinions of the students, to use in-service education and post-graduate education opportunities to complete the training deficiencies and to carry out the studies on this issue in a larger sample. In addition, it is recommended that future research be conducted after students receive clinical training and necessary COVID-19 information.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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