

## Original Article

## Mental Images of Nursing Students Regarding Nursing Profession: A Metaphoric Study

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study which has been planned with the purpose of determining nursing students' professional perceptions with metaphors, is a descriptive one.

**Method:** This descriptive study has been completed with 239 students who have accepted to participate the study. It has been carried out among 380 students who have been enrolled to nursing faculty in 2018-2019 academic year. The data have been collected with Demographic Data Form and metaphor perception form regarding nursing profession. Demographic data form has been prepared by the researcher in accordance with the literature. In metaphor perception form, perceptions of the students regarding nursing have been determined by addressing "Nursing is like ..... because ....." question. In addition, the answers of the students to open-ended metaphor question have been evaluated by making descriptive analysis and content analysis with document examining method.

**Results:** The total 239 metaphors obtained have been collected under a total of 6 categories in terms of their common features. In the study, Human (68), Non-Living Thing (66), Hero-Abstract One (46), Illuminating-Guide (29), Living Creature (16) and Connects to Life (15) categories have been obtained.

**Conclusion:** While it has been observed that most of the students in the scope of the study used positive metaphors about nursing profession, it has been noticed that metaphors such as computer and robot reflect negative perception. Again, among the frequently used metaphors by students, such as angel and mother show that the concepts such as protection and sacrifice, which influence the emergence of nursing profession, are still showing their effects.

**Keywords:** Metaphor, Mental Image, Nursing, Nursing Profession, Nursing Student.

### Introduction

Whether people can maintain their lives happily or not is closely associated with their personalities, choice of profession which can suit their areas of interest, and their professional satisfaction (Kırag, 2015). Occupational satisfaction of individuals with nursing profession is related to how they perceive nursing profession. The concept of perception is a mental image or interpretation of knowledge, experiences, attitudes and beliefs (Gleran et al., 2017). For the individuals who are in nursing profession, the meaning that they have attributed

to nursing profession is crucial in order to reach professional satisfaction. Nursing is a profession that focuses on humanistic and holistic care philosophy by considering the healthy/sick individual together with his close and wide circle with handling him with a holistic approach (Karaoz 2000; Acaroglu & Sendir, 2012).

When looked in general terms, nursing profession is an occupational group which includes international diversity, can offer flexible work opportunities and has career stability (Morris, 2010; Tuckett, Kim, Huh, 2017).

Nursing profession, which emerged in an attempt to help sick people and those in need, gained a professional identity thanks to Florence Nightingale and was affected by the needs of the society in every process (Kaya, Turan, Ozturk, 2011). Nursing, which emerges along with the needs of the society, is affected by the society in which it creates its professional perception (Yilmaz & Karadag, 2011).

Professional perception is not only a phenomenon that occurs in business life, the concept of professional perception refers to a mental image regarding the profession (Gleran et al., 2017). There are many positive and negative images in the literature regarding the nursing profession. It is expected from the students, who were socially affected by this image when they started their education life, that the first perception will be replaced with the professional perspective of the profession. Nursing students develop their own professional definitions and perceptions during nursing education (Karaoz, 2002). It has been suggested that positive perceptions about nursing profession increase the success level of students and play a key role in establishing a trustworthy relationship with their patients (Cabaniss, 2011; Morris-Thompson et al., 2011; Cukljek, Juresa, Babic, 2017).

As a result of determining the perceptions of nursing students regarding the profession, it is possible to contribute to the professional development with the recognition of the problems of the students before they get a start in business life and on behalf of the search for solutions (Kale & Cicek, 2015).

Metaphors have been frequently used in the recent years with the purpose of defining the perceptions of the individuals regarding their professions. Metaphors are tools used for naming individuals' perceptions towards phenomena (Cetinkaya, 2014; Saban, 2009). Metaphors reveal how the individual interprets life and events (Kale & Cicek, 2015). In this regard, this study, which has been carried out with the aim of determining nursing students' professional perceptions with metaphors, is a descriptive one.

## Method

**Type of Research:** The study is a qualitative study that has been planned in a phenomenological manner. Phenomenological research style offers examples, researches, and

experiences that will help us to understand the concept better (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2011).

**Research Universe and Sample:** No sample has been selected in the study, and it has been aimed to include all of the students studying in the nursing department of a university. The study has been completed with 239 students who have accepted to participate the study. It has been carried out among 380 students who have been enrolled to nursing faculty in 2018-2019 academic year.

**Data Collection Method:** The data have been collected with Demographic Data Form and Metaphor Perception Form Regarding Nursing profession. Demographic data form has been prepared by the researcher in accordance with the literature. In metaphor perception form, perceptions of the students regarding nursing have been determined by addressing "Nursing is like ..... because ....." question. In metaphor studies, the term like is generally used to create a clearer association between the subject and origin of the metaphor. The data have been collected by the researcher during the education period. The students have been given an explanation about metaphors, and a metaphor sample has been added to the data collection form and it has been provided that the students be able to create their own metaphors.

**Ethical Issues:** In order to conduct the research, the required permit has been taken from the ethics committee of Karabuk University non-interventional clinical research with the decision dated 02.05.2018 and numbered 5/3 and Faculty of Health Sciences Nursing Department, in which the research will be conducted. In addition, the students have signed the voluntary consent form, which shows they have participated voluntarily.

**Analysis of the Data:** Data have been evaluated by means of SPSS program and document evaluation method. Descriptive data have been summarized as percentage.

Moreover, the answers of the students to open-ended metaphor question have been evaluated by making descriptive analysis and content analysis with document examining method. First of all, it has been tried to reveal whether the students can explain the metaphors that they have developed and all of metaphors regarding nurse concept have been coded (e.g. mother, angel etc.). And next the metaphors produced by the students were reviewed individually, and each metaphor image was analysed in terms of the (a) subject of

the metaphor, (b) origin of the metaphor, and (c) the relationship between the subject and origin of the metaphor. All metaphors have been read and analyzed. Then, the total 239 metaphors obtained have been collected under a total of 6 conceptual categories in terms of their common features (living creature, non-living thing, human etc.). Then, the obtained data have been reviewed and metaphor expressions representing each metaphor have been determined and written in lists. The opinions that are thought to represent the students' general views have been determined and presented as sample expressions.

**Results** When the sociodemographic characteristics of the students have been examined, it has been noticed that 77.0% of them are women and 61.5% of them are in 19-21 age group. It has been realized that there was a similar proportion of participants from each year; however, it has been determined that the highest participation percentage is from the ones in the 4<sup>th</sup> year with 27.6%. It has been determined that 82.4% of the students have elementary families, 70.8% of them have incomes equal to expenses and 74.5% of them have chosen nursing profession voluntarily (Table 1).

**Table 1: Results Related to Descriptive Features of Students (N=239)**

		n	%
Gender	Female	184	77,0
	Male	55	23,0
Age	18 and below	26	10,9
	19-21	147	61,5
	22-24	58	24,3
	25 and above	8	3,3
Year	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	65	27,2
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	57	23,8
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	51	21,3
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	66	27,6
Income status	Income is Less than Expense	46	19,2
	Income equals to Expense	169	70,8
	Income is Higher than Expense	24	10
Family Structure	Elementary Family	197	82,4
	Fragmented Family	8	3,3
	Extended Family	25	10,5
	Other	9	3,7
Choosing the Profession Voluntarily	Yes	178	74,5
	No	61	25,5

**Table 2. Metaphors of the Students Regarding Nursing Profession (N=239)**

Category	n	%	Themes
Human	67	%28,03	Mother (38), Family (9), Friend (5), Teacher (3), Parent (2), Trainer (2), Big Sister (1), Researcher (1), Security Officer (1), Slave (1), Doctor (1), The Conqueror (Fatih Sultan) (1) Relatives (1), Sibling (1)
Non-Living Thing	66	%27,61	Drug (16), Book (6), Computer (5), Robot (5), Painkiller (4), Band-Aid (3), Smartphone (2), Clock (2), Dollar (2), Battery (2), Mirror (2), Soap (2), Machine (2), Scales (1), Programmed tool (1), Sandbag (1), Diamond (1), Cotton (1), Computer Game (1) , Planner (1), Pawn (1), Wall (1), Atlas (1), Locomotive (1), Alarm (1), Women's Bag (1)
Hero-Abstract One	46	%19,24	Angel (27), Deus Ex Machina (5), Healing Hands (3), Unending path (2), Confidence (2), Magic (2), God's hand (1), Warrior (1), Superhero (1) , Heart (1), Hope (1)
Illuminating-Guide	29	%12,13	Sun (11), Lantern (4), Candle (3), Guide (3), Compass (2), Sky (2), Moon (2), Light (1), Traffic Sign (1)
Living Creature	16	%6,69	Tree (5), Flower (3), Ant (2), Bee (1), Rose (1), Orchid (1), Daisy (1), Bee (1), Octopus (1), Butterfly (1)
Connects to Life	15	%6,27	Water (8), Safety Belt (3), Lifesaver (2), Building Basis (2),

As a result of the study, which has been conducted in order to investigate the perceptions of students regarding the nursing profession, a total of 239 metaphors have been obtained in 6 categories (Table 2). While it has been observed that most of the students in the scope of the study used positive metaphors about nursing profession, it has been noticed that metaphors such as computer and robot reflect negative perception. Again, among the frequently used metaphors by students, such as angel and mother show that the concepts such as protection and sacrifice, which influence the emergence of nursing profession, are still showing their effects. The obtained categories and frequently used metaphors regarding these categories' examples are presented below.

### Category 1: Human

When Table 2 has been examined, it has been realized that nurses have been explained as humans with 66 metaphors. The most frequently used metaphors in this category are *mother, family, friend* and *teacher*.

*"Our mothers try to do their best to make sure of our good health and comfort. I think nursing is like motherhood. That's why I like it very much. He/She should think about everything about the patients' comfort and good health and try to go the extra mile to balance them."*

*"Mothers sacrifice everything for their children, and nurses for their patients."*

*"He/She protects their patients and provides every care."*

*"Just like the fact that our families are always there for us, we try help and be with our patients without even considering our health and sickness condition."*

*"He/She takes care of the psychological and physical problems of the individual in bad days (in times of sickness)."*

*"He/She teaches, helps people and endures lots of things."*

### Category 2: Non-Living Thing

When the conceptual categories given in Table 2 have been examined, it has been noticed that the students tried to define nurses with 69 metaphors. The most commonly used metaphors in this category are *medicine, book, computer* and *robot*.

*"He/She is a remedy for every trouble and pain of the people."*

*"He/She works everywhere. Install the program you want to the computer, then work on that. This is the same with the nurse, send it to a department you want, give the orientation there and make him/her work."*

*"He/She does every work, without being bored or tired."*

*"He/She carries all the information about health on him/her."*

### **Category 3: Hero-Utopia**

When Table 2 has been examined, it has been realized that students defined nurses as heroes or utopic creatures with 44 metaphors. The most frequently used metaphors in this category are *angel, deus ex machina* and *healing hands*.

*"He/She does good without waiting for something in return; he/she has compassion and patience."*

*"He/She helps people's health conditions to get well by helping them regain their health in the best way possible."*

*"He/She is right next to you in the exact moment that you think you will 'die'."*

*"He/She is ready like deus ex machina, in the most complex situations and when you need the help most."*

*"He/She heals the thing that he/she touches, and he/she should."*

*"He/She looks at the patients' eyes and caresses their hearts."*

**Category 4: Illuminating-Guide** It has been concluded that the students defined nurses as illuminating-guides with 29 metaphors. The most frequently used metaphors in this category are *sun, lantern, and candle*.

*"People need them in the dark."*

*"He/She warms us with his/her goodness and mercy."*

*"Illuminates people's homes by saving their lives."*

*"He/She does not heat his/her own place but enlightens his/her surroundings."*

*"He/She sacrifices himself/herself to benefit his/her circle."*

*"He/She guides his/her patient."*

*"In any case, without discriminating humans, he/she helps everyone in any condition receiving nothing in return."*

### **Category 5: Living Creature**

When Table 2 has been examined, it has been noticed that the students explained nurses as

living creatures with 16 metaphors. The most frequently used metaphors in this category are *tree, flower, and ant*.

*"He/She will be the shadow, helps you when you least expect it."*

*"His/Her fruit is health."*

*"The nurse also has many leaves, and each leaf has a separate person."*

*"It is the flower that blossoms when the patient needs to feel happy; it is the blossom that helps and gives joy."*

*"He/She is hardworking, never delays his/her work."*

*"He/She takes care of the psychological and physical problems of the individual in bad days (in times of sickness)."*

*"He/She teaches, helps people and endures lots of things."*

*"He/She has educational role."*

### **Category 6: Connects to Life**

When Table 2 has been examined, it has been realized that the students in the study explained nurses with concepts that connect to life with 15 metaphors. The most common metaphors used by students in this category are *water, seat belt, lifesaver and building basis*.

*"Wherever he/she is, he/she spreads lifelike water."*

*"He/She is like a drop of water that revives even a faded flower."*

*"Clings to life."*

*"Always saves lives."*

*"He/She is always there for people in the darkest times, saves them from drowning."*

*"Like a building needs a proper basis, a hospital needs nurses who do their job well."*

### **Discussion**

In order to determine the professional perceptions of nursing students, a total of 6 categories have been obtained in accordance with the metaphors created by the students.

When they have been analyzed in the historical process, perceptions have been realized to create images such as "mother", "angel of goodness", "hero", "warrior", "bad/naughty", "doctor's assistant", "sex object" in people's minds about

nursing profession (Cabaniss, 2011; Holmes, 2012; Morris & Thompson, 2011; Price & McGills, 2013). In this study, it has been deduced that some of these images attributed to a nurse in the historical process have never been expressed by the students, but it is also possible to notice that the concepts perceived as positive by the society such as "angel", "hero" and "warrior" continue to leave an impression on the students.

The most commonly used metaphor under the human category appears to be the "mother". History of nursing is known to have started with the healing role of women. It has been widely acknowledged that women give care to babies, children and elderly throughout the history of humanity (Turan et al., 2011). Image of the mother is identified with sacrifice and obedience. The main factor in the emergence of mother image is World War II. During and after the war, people's desire to feel in balance and secure was dominant, and the fact that nurses met all the needs of the individuals they undertook was effective on people's perception of a nurse as a "mother". (Holmes, 2012). When the literature has been reviewed, it has been observed that nursing is perceived as a female profession in many studies (DeMeis, De Almeida Souza, Ferreira da Silva Filho, 2007; Liu, 2010; Hovee, Jansen, Roodpol, 2014).

The students frequently explained the nurse with a non-living thing. Medicine, book, computer and robot metaphors were frequently used in the first category, the non-living thing category. While students used the metaphors of medicine and books in a positive sense, they used computer and robot concepts in a more negative sense. Most of the students stated that they consider the nurse to be the "painkiller" (person) and that they helped their patients with their knowledge. In a study having been carried out by Gleran et al. (2017) with the aim of detecting young people's view on nursing profession, they similarly pointed out the aspect of treatment of nursing. When nursing roles are examined, it can be said that nursing care, especially nursing and curative and educative roles of a nurse affect the perception about nursing (Taylan, Alan, Kadioglu, 2012). The most important responsibility of nursing is the concept of "care giving", a concept that involves many improvements such as healing interaction, knowledge and skills of the nurse, and helping the patient (Atar& Astı, 2012). It has been

realized that the metaphors "medicine" and "book" having been used by the students indicate nurses' educational role and therapeutic role, especially as caregivers. Likewise, Hovee et al. (2013) reported that the basic image of nursing profession was focused on giving care. It is a pleasing finding that the students take their professional roles into consideration when expressing their perceptions of their own professions because the perception of the profession of nursing is one of the most important factors affecting professional development. (Kirag, 2015; Hovee, Jansen, Roodbol, 2013).

Other metaphors that students frequently expressed in the category of non-living things are "computer" and "robot". While explaining these metaphors, it has been noticed that the students used the expressions related to nurses' tasks assigned to them with the mere expectation of fulfillment. Bodur and Kaya (2015) examined the future in the 2050s from the eyes of nurses, and they stated that nurses' fields of expertise would increase and robotic nurses would give care to individuals as a remote possibility.

It is seen that students explain the nurse using the word hero or abstract concepts. Under this category, the most common metaphors used are "angels", "deus ex machina" and "healing hands". The basic concepts that come to the fore in the majority of metaphors has been found to be the concepts of "goodness receiving nothing in return", "compassion" and "sacrifice". Especially "angel" perception in nursing is accepted to have been triggered and emerged by the roles and responsibilities of women in the 19th century (Holmes, 2012). In the historical process, it is possible to realize that a nurse is still doomed to be perceived as a "hero" or "angel". The perception of the nursing profession as an "angel" or "hero" creates problems for nurses since it stands in the way of recognizing their professional roles and responsibilities (Price & McGills Hall, 2013). Nevertheless, in the literature, similarly, Tzeng (2006) reported in a study conducted by Taiwanese nurses for their professional image that nurses defined themselves as "angels of goodness".

Under the category of illuminating-guide, which is another significant category, it has been noticed that the students often defined the nurse with the "sun" and "guide" metaphors. When the students' statements have been examined, it has

been concluded that they emphasized points such as nurses' compassion and guiding their patients. When the compassion, which is the first one of these concepts, is examined, it can be stated that it is a phenomenon that embraces individuals beyond empathy and respect. It understands the pain or distress suffered by someone else. (Uslu & Korkmaz, 2017). The basic concept underlying the philosophy of nursing is that each individual is unique and private. When it has been considered in this context, it has been observed that the perceptions of students about nursing were in accordance with the nursing philosophy. Another point having been emphasized in this category was the emphasis that students made on the nurses' guidance to their patients. At this point, it can be suggested that the students are aware of the educational role of nurses and reflect this to their nursing perception. (Taylan, Alan, Kadioglu 2012).

The other two categories having been obtained in the study were the "connects to life" and "living creatures" categories, and it has been realized that the students often used the metaphors "water" and "safety belt" under the category of "connects to life". Here, it is significant to note that in their studies, Tuckett et al. (2017) stated that nursing profession was perceived by the concept of "vital". The profession of nursing has taken its place as an indispensable profession since the beginning of humankind and students are aware of this. "Tree", "flower" and "ant" metaphors were used under the "living creature" category. While the students attributed the metaphors of "tree" and "flower" to help people and make them happy, they used "ant" metaphor to emphasize the working conditions. Kale and Cicek (2015) reported that nurses used metaphors similar to "tree" and "ant" in their perceptions of their profession.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In this particular study, which is related to the perceptions of nursing students regarding nursing profession, it has been observed that the perceptions that can affect the professionalism of nursing profession and are perceived as positive by the society such as "mother" and "angel" from the historical process are still prevalent. Along with this, many positive metaphors and sentences that are compatible with nursing roles in the students' expressions have been analyzed. It has been concluded that, even though they are

minority, some students have negative perceptions about nursing profession.

In line with these results, it can be suggested to include nursing roles and responsibilities in a way that will positively affect the perception of nursing during nursing education and to repeat the study with other nursing students and nurse groups.

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