

## Original Article

## Examination of Professional Self-Concept in Nurses in Terms of Certain Variables

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### Abstract

**Background:** The professional self is the set of beliefs and values that guide the nurse's interactions with the patient and their way of thinking and actions.

**Aim:** This study was conducted to examine the level of professional self-concept and the affecting factors in nurses.

**Method:** The sample of the present descriptive study consisted of 256 nurses. The data were obtained via Personal Information Form (PIF) and Professional Self Concept Inventory for Nurses (PSCIN). Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were used for data analysis.

**Results:** Overall PSCIN mean total score was determined to be  $103.42 \pm 11.94$ . There was a statistically significant difference between gender, age, clinical status, working style, work position held, willingness in choosing the profession, finding the profession suitable for self and satisfaction with work life and the mean PSCI scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was determined that the characteristics of nurses such as education, marital status and having a child do not affect the concept of professional self ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The findings of the research indicated that the level of professional self-concept of nurses was average. Managing nurses may organize professional self development training programs for newly graduated, young, and insufficiently educated and nurse clinicians working in shifts.

**Key words:** Nursing; concept of professional self; professionalism

### Introduction

Nursing is an applied health discipline that deals with the health status of the individual, family and society and it has succeeded in renewing itself through social, cultural and technological changes from past to present (Akça, 2010). International Council of Nurses (ICN) defines nursing as an occupational group that "encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings" (ICN, 2002). The professional self is the values and beliefs owned by the nurse that guide the nurse's interactions with the patient, her actions, and the way the nurse thinks (Fagermoen, 1997; Gregg & Magilvy, 2001). The professional self-concept is the set of beliefs and values that guide the nurse's interactions with the patient, their way of thinking and actions. (Strasen, 1992).

The development of professional self image begins with vocational training and continues to develop throughout working life (Kasikçici et al., 2009). In this process, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethical standards of nursing are internalized. In case of inadequate development of concept of professional self, serious problems such as inability to have a say in the professional field, inability to fulfill the professional role, disapproval by other members of the profession, and inadequacy in meeting the standards of the profession and establishing a connection with the profession occur (Costello, 2004). These problems primarily affect individual and then the institution and may cause the services to be negatively affected (Erbil & Bakir, 2009). When the professional self-concept develops positively, It is stated that more satisfaction is obtained from the profession, burnout and quitting are reduced, service

delivery quality improves and the profession representation is stronger (Gregg & Magilvy, 2001; Deppoliti, 2008).

The low level of professional qualifications of nurses affects the efficient delivery of nursing services, the development and the image of the profession and the quality of health care received by the community (Sabancıogulları & Dogan, 2012). In their study, Lu et al. (2002) stated that most of the nurses experienced job dissatisfaction and burnout in the environment in which they work, and that many of them carried out their profession with dislike. In addition, nurses have a high rate of quitting or changing jobs (Lu et al., 2002; Hayes et al., 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2010). All these results indicate that nurses' professional qualifications and therefore professional self-concepts are not at a good level and require improvement. Nurses with strong professional self images can positively influence their colleagues, patients and professions by influentially representing the profession amongst society, health care settings and policies (Strasen, 1992; Deppoliti, 2008; McKenna & Gren, 2004; Ohlen & Segesten, 1998). Since the professional self is indispensable in the behavior and practice of nurses, it can be stated that it is important to determine the nursing professional self development and affecting factors.

## Methods

**Study participants:** The research was conducted as a descriptive study in order to determine the levels of professional self-concept and the factors affecting the nurses working in hospital. The population of the study consisted of 357 nurses working in a public hospital. 316 nurses were included in the study because 41 of them were on annual / maternal / unpaid leave. The sample of the study consisted of 256 nurses who volunteered to participate in the study between October 2016 and February 2017. The participation rate of the nurses was 71.71%.

**Data Collection:** Personal Information Form (PIF) and Professional Self-Concept Inventory for Nurses (PSCIN) were used to collect the research data. The data of the study were collected by the researchers during the working hours within available periods of the nurses by face-to-face interviews.

**Data Collection:** *Personal Information Form.* It was prepared by the researchers. In the

information form, there are questions to determine the nurses' age, working year and their opinions on the profession.

**PSCIN.** It was developed in order to determine the level of professional self-concept of actively working nurses by Sabancıogulları et al. (2011), and validity and reliability studies were conducted by the same individuals. The scale is a 36-item, three-subdimensional, 4-point Likert-type self-assessment scale. The total score obtained by getting the total of the scores of 36 items varies between 36-144. The total score from the "professional satisfaction (PS)" subgroup of the scale ranges between 5-20, the total score from the "professional competence (PC)" subgroup between 7-28 and the total score from the "professional attitude and skill (PAS)" subgroup between 24-96. The total Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.87, it was 0.80 for the "professional satisfaction" and "professional attitude and skill" sub-dimensions, and 0.82 for the "professional competence" sub-dimension. The retest reliability of the test was 0.76. Professional satisfaction refers to the professional satisfaction and overall satisfaction of nurses. Professional attitudes and skills include the qualifications of the profession and their feelings, thoughts and beliefs related to their fulfillment. Professional competence includes self-assessment in terms of professional qualifications (problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, professional knowledge and skills, professional competence, etc.) required to perform the nursing profession. Professional competence is how competent a person perceives himself/herself in terms of complex and high-level skills. The high score indicates that nurses' professional self-concept develops positively (Sabancıogulları, et al., 2011). In the sampling of this study, the internal consistency of the scale was determined to be 0.88.

**Ethical Aspect of the Study:** Written permission was obtained from the authors via e-mail for the use of the inventory in the research. In order to carry out the research, written permission was obtained from the relevant State Hospital's Chief Physician where the the application was to be conducted, Provincial Health Directorate and Aksaray University Human Research Ethics Committee (Date: 23.09.2016 No: 2016/32). Verbal consent was obtained from the nurses who participated in the study. Nurses were informed about the purpose and reason of the study and volunteering was

taken as a basis for their participation in the study.

**Data Analysis:** The data were analyzed with SPSS v24.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows version 24.0) software package. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. The normal distribution of the data was examined with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Since the data were not normally distributed, Mann Whitney U test was used for binary comparisons and Kruskal Wallis test was used for comparing more than two variables.  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

### Findings

It was determined that 86.3% of the nurses who participated in the study were female, 37.9% were between 30-37 years of age, 52% had undergraduate degree, 72.7% were married, 68.4% had children and 32.4% had work experience of between six and ten years, 86.7% served as a service nurse, 71.5% chose the profession voluntarily, 70.7% found the

profession to be suitable for themselves and 75.4% were not satisfied with the work life (Table 1).

Nurses' PSCI overall total mean score was found to be  $103.42 \pm 11.94$ , the mean score of the sub-scale was  $12.52 \pm 2.56$  in the "professional satisfaction" dimension,  $21.09 \pm 3.28$  in the "professional competence" dimension, and  $69.81 \pm 8.07$  in the "professional attitude and skill" dimension (Table 2).

In the analysis, a statistically significant difference was found between gender and age of nurses and PSCI total mean scores ( $p < 0.05$ ); and, no statistically significant difference was determined between the marital status, whether or not having children and educational status and PSCI total mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

There was a statistically significant difference between gender, age, clinics they work at, working style, working position, willingness to choose the profession, finding the profession to be suitable and satisfaction with work life and total PSCI mean scores ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4).

Table 1: Distribution of introductory and professional characteristics of nurses

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	221	86.3
Male	35	13.7
Age group		
29 years and under	88	34.4
30-37 years	97	37.9
38 years and older	71	27.7
Educational background		
High school	45	17.6
Associate	68	26.5
Undergraduate	133	52.0
Master's	10	3.9
Marital status		
Single	70	27.3
Married	186	72.7
Parental Status		
Positive	175	68.4
Negative	81	31.6
Duration of Professional Experience		
1-5 years	48	18.7
6-10 years	83	32.4

11-15 years	47	18.4
16-20 years	46	18.0
21 years and above	32	12.5
<b>Clinic Served In</b>		
Surgical services	51	19.9
Internal medicine services	78	30.5
Intensive care	60	23.4
Emergency services	34	13.3
Other support units	33	12.9
<b>Working type</b>		
Day	88	34.4
In shifts	136	53.1
Night shift only	32	12.5
<b>Position</b>		
Department nurse	222	86.7
Head nurse	34	13.3
<b>Willingly selected the profession</b>		
Yes	183	71.5
No	73	28.5
<b>Profession suitable to self</b>		
Applicable	181	70.7
Non-applicable	75	29.3
<b>Satisfaction with professional life</b>		
Satisfied	63	24.6
Unsatisfied	193	75.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2:** Nurses' professional self-concept scale total and sub-dimension mean scores (n = 256)

Scale	$\bar{X} \pm S$	Lowest-highest value taken from the scale	Lowest-highest value that can be obtained from the scale
Total PSCIN	103.42±11.94	59-136	36-144
Professional Satisfaction	12.52±2.56	5-19	5-20
Professional Competence	21.09±3.28	7-28	7-28
Professional Attitude and Skill	69.81±8.07	40-90	24-96

**Table 3:** Comparison of total and sub-dimension mean scores of professional self-concept scale according to nursing descriptive characteristics (n = 256)

Descriptive Characteristics	PSCIN	PS	PC	PAS
	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$
Gender				
Female	104.03±12.12	12.65±2.61	21.16±3.26	70.21±8.11
Male	99.57±10.12	11.71±2.05	20.62±3.39	67.22±7.43
Test value	$z=-2.548$	$z=-2.291$	$z=-1.252$	$z=-2.308$
P	<b>p=0.011</b>	<b>p=0.022</b>	p=0.211	<b>p=0.021</b>
Age group				
29 years and under	102.84±11.07	12.32±2.35	21.15±2.95	69.37±7.78
30-37 years	102.07±13.18	12.47±2.55	20.86±3.83	68.73±8.77
38 years and older	105.98±10.95	12.84±2.81	21.32±2.87	71.81±7.13
Test value	$\chi^2=6.415$	$\chi^2=0.923$	$\chi^2=1.037$	$\chi^2=8.155$
P	<b>p=0.040</b>	p=0.630	p=0.595	<b>p=0.017</b>
Educational background				
High school	99.60±15.04	12.09±2.69	20.02±4.03	67.48±9.84
Associate	102.01±10.56	12.42±2.14	20.45±3.28	69.13±7.04
Undergraduate	105.24±11.17	12.70±2.71	21.71±2.90	70.83±7.79
Master's	106.00±11.59	12.80±2.70	21.90±2.72	71.30±8.11
Test value	$\chi^2=3.670$	$\chi^2=3.011$	$\chi^2=7.126$	$\chi^2=2.511$
P	p=0.299	p=0.390	p=0.068	p=0.473
Marital status				
Married	103.44±11.42	12.66±2.53	20.98±3.13	69.79±7.53
Single	103.35±13.33	12.14±2.62	21.37±3.67	69.84±9.41
Test value	$z=-0.250$	$z=-1.463$	$z=-1.319$	$z=-0.334$
P	p=0.802	p=0.143	p=0.187	p=0.739
Parental Status				
Positive	103.72±11.63	12.70±2.59	21.03±3.18	69.99±7.68
Negative	102.77±12.65	12.13±2.46	21.22±3.51	69.42±8.90
Test value	$z=-0.676$	$z=-1.820$	$z=-0.692$	$z=-0.486$
P	p=0.499	p=0.069	p=0.489	p=0.627

**Table 4:** Comparison of total and sub-dimension mean scores of professional self-concept scale according to professional characteristics of nurses (n = 256)

Professional Qualifications	PSCIN	PS	PC	PAS
	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$	$X \pm SD$
Duration of Professional Experience				
1-5 years	102.56±13.24	12.54±2.74	20.66±3.30	69.35±9.05
6-10 years	102.40±12.99	12.32±2.28	21.05±3.74	69.02±8.84
11-15 years	102.29±11.03	12.38±3.17	21.06±3.35	68.85±7.30
16-20 years	105.50±10.50	12.54±2.14	21.30±2.69	71.65±6.95
21 years and above	106.03±10.10	13.18±2.58	21.56±2.71	71.28±6.71
Test value	$\chi^2=6.229$	$\chi^2=1.487$	$\chi^2=2.321$	$\chi^2=8.017$
P	p=0.183	p=0.829	p=0.677	p=0.091
Clinic Served In				
Surgical services	100.90±7.90	11.96±1.84	20.58±2.49	68.35±5.85
Internal medicine	101.02±13.45	12.47±2.92	20.45±3.78	68.10±8.58
Services				
Intensive care	105.35±14.43	12.70±2.73	21.71±3.91	70.93±9.58
Emergency services	102.76±8.88	12.47±2.02	21.14±2.64	69.14±7.15
Other support units	110.15±7.79	13.24±2.70	22.18±1.72	74.73±5.33
Test value	$\chi^2=25.064$	$\chi^2=5.958$	$\chi^2=17.967$	$\chi^2=26.499$
P	<b>p=0.000</b>	p=0.202	<b>p=0.001</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>
Working type				
Day	107.80±10.58	13.21±2.72	21.93±2.89	72.66±6.64
In Shifts	100.95±11.23	12.34±2.31	20.52±3.20	68.08±7.83
Night shift only	101.87±15.06	11.37±2.67	21.18±4.13	69.31±10.42
Test value	$\chi^2=23.008$	$\chi^2=16.418$	$\chi^2=13.626$	$\chi^2=21.038$
P	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.001</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>
Position				
Department nurse	102.54±11.95	12.44±2.51	20.86±3.34	69.23±8.16
Head nurse	109.15±10.32	13.06±2.84	22.56±2.45	73.53±6.40
Test value	$z=-3.244$	$z=-0.892$	$z=-3.260$	$z=-3.261$
P	<b>p=0.001</b>	p=0.372	<b>p=0.001</b>	<b>p=0.001</b>
Willingly selected the profession				
Yes	105.73±10.57	13.17±2.29	21.45±2.83	71.10±7.36
No	97.63±13.25	10.89±2.49	20.16±4.08	66.57±8.88
Test value	$z=-4.562$	$z=-6.315$	$z=-2.430$	$z=-3.811$
P	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.015</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>
Profession suitable to self				
Applicable	106.68±9.95	13.21±2.34	21.72±2.71	71.75±6.94
Non-applicable	95.56±12.75	10.86±2.30	19.57±3.99	65.12±8.72
Test value	$z=-6.578$	$z=-6.813$	$z=-3.800$	$z=-5.658$
P	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>
Satisfaction with professional life				
Satisfied	106.77±10.27	13.77±2.33	21.46±2.58	71.54±7.16
Unsatisfied	102.32±12.27	12.11±2.51	20.96±3.48	69.24±8.29
Test value	$z=-2.903$	$z=-4.390$	$z=-0.867$	$z=-2.058$
P	<b>p=0.004</b>	<b>p=0.000</b>	p=0.386	<b>p=0.040</b>

## Discussion

The research was conducted as a descriptive study in order to determine the levels of professional self-concept in nurses and the factors affecting the nurses working in hospital. The total mean score of the PSCI of the nurses who participated in the study was determined to be  $103.42 \pm 11.94$ . The total score obtained from the scale varies between 36-144 and the high score indicates that nurses' professional self-concept has developed in a positive way. It can be said that the perception of the professional self-concept of nurses participating in the research is moderate. In the study conducted with nurses, Andrews et al. (2011) found that nurses' professional self was above moderate and nurses' professional self-perception level was high (Kelly & Courts, 2007). In different studies conducted in our country, Simsek (2014) determined PSCI total mean score of executive nurses as 110.08, Şen (2014) found PSCI total mean score of the nurses working in pediatric care to be 113.85, Kucuk, (2016) identified PSCI total mean score of the nurses working in psychiatric clinics as 114.17, Sabanciogullari et al. (2018) found PSCI total mean score of the nurses working in internal medicine, surgery units and intensive care units as 111.22, and Sabanciogullari & Dogan (2014) determined that score of the nurses working at a university Hospital to be 123.91. Likewise, Karamanoglu et al. (2009), Celik et al. (2012), Goris et al. (2014) and Demir & Kocaman-Yildirim (2014) reported in their studies that nurses exhibited a good level of professional attitude. When compared to the results in the literature, in our study, low professional self perception scores of nurses could be interpreted as an upsetting result.

In our study, the overall total mean score of PSCIN was higher in female nurses than male nurses and this difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). In various studies conducted similar to our research, the mean score of professional self-perception of females was found to be significantly higher than that of males (Geckil, et al., 2012; Martin, et al., 2003; Hendel, et al., 2006). Unlike our research Goris et al. (2014) and Parvan et al. (2012) found that gender did not affect professional values, whereas Lin & Wang (2010) found that the mean score of males was higher than that of females.

In the study, nurses 38 years of age and older scored the highest in PSCIN. As the age of

nurses increased, professional self-concept scores increased. Similar studies supporting the findings of the study also found that as the age of nurses increased, the levels of professional self-concept increased positively (Adams et al., 2006; Kelly & Courts, 2007; Lin & Wang, 2010; Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2014). This finding indicates that professional self development continues with the increase in the experience and diversity of practice of nurses. It is stated in the literature that the professional self-development of nurses continues throughout the working life (Costello, 2004; Deppoliti, 2008).

In our study, it was found that the characteristics of nurses such as educational status, marital status and having a child did not affect the concept of professional self. Similarly, in their study, Goris et al. (2014) determined that educational status, marital status and having children did not change the perception of professional self-worth. Likewise, in some studies, it was found that the demographic characteristics of nurses did not affect their professionalism levels (Karamanoglu et al., 2015; Kucuk, 2016).

In the research, nurses with post-graduate education level had PSCI score of 106.00, those with undergraduate degree 105.24, those with associate degree 102.01, and those with high school graduation scored 99.60. As the level of education decreases, it is seen that professional self concept mean scores decrease, but not at a statistically significant level. Similarly, there is a study showing that education does not change professional self-perception (Karamanoglu, et al., 2009). Contrary to our research, Beydag & Arslan's (2008) study found that the occupational professionalism of medical vocational high school graduates is lower compared to other educational levels and that the professional level increases as the education level increases. Nurses' perceptions of occupational professional attitudes were higher in those with postgraduate degree (Hisar & Karadag, 2010; Celik et al., 2012; Demir & Kocaman-Yildirim, 2014). Nurses' training in the field has an impact in the development of professional self concept, and this development continues along with occupational experience. In this context, it is seen that nurses who have received education at undergraduate and postgraduate level have better levels of professional self-concept, and this can be interpreted as the duration of education is effective in acquiring professionalism.

In the study, the total mean PSCI score of nurses who worked 21 years or more was found to be 106.03, and the score of those with 16-20 years of experience was 105.50. Total mean PSCIN scores of those with 11-15 years of experience (102.29), those with 6-10 years of experience (102.40) and those with 1-5 years of experience (102.56) were within a close range. Similar to our study, in Şen's study (2014), nurses whose employment term was between 0-5 years and in the study conducted by Arthur et al. (1998), nurses with 3 years and less experience had low professional self perception scores. In the study carried out by Sabancıoğulları and Dogan (2014), the lowest score of the nurses from the PSCI was obtained by nurses with a working experience of 1-4 years and the highest score was obtained by nurses working for 9 years and over. Also, as a result of several different studies on this subject, nurses who had more years of work experience had higher professional self-perception (Arthur et al., 1998; Pilehvarzadeh et al., 2003; Karadag et al., 2004; Adams et al., 2006). In these studies, it is seen that as the working experience of nurses' increases, their professional self becomes more positive. Support can be obtained from highly educated, experienced and confident nurses in the profession to improve the professional self of newly graduated nurses.

There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean PSCIN score in terms of the clinics of the nurses included in the study. This difference was determined to have stemmed from other support units, emergency, internal medicine and surgery clinics, surgical and intensive care clinics. Likewise, it was found that the clinics in which nurses' work were effective in occupational professionalism and there were differences between the units (Celik et al., 2012; Dikmen et al., 2014; Beydag & Arslan, 2008; Demir & Kocaman-Yıldırım, 2014). The fact that nurses work in different clinics suggests that individual or environmental factors such as knowledge, skills, experience and working conditions may affect attitudes to the nursing occupation and professionalism.

In the study, nurses working as service supervisors and daytime nurses had higher mean scores of PSCI and this difference was statistically significant. Similarly, in the study of Sabancıoğulları and Dogan (2014), PSCI scores of nurses working as supervisors and in daytime positions were found to be significantly higher. Pilehvarzadeh et al. (2003) in the study they

conducted found that there is a significant relationship between nurses' professional self-concept levels and the type of work. This finding may be due to the fact that responsible nurses have more opportunities to undertake different tasks such as autonomy, team communication and managerial responsibilities besides patient care.

In the study, the overall PSCIN mean score was found to be significantly higher among the nurses who willingly chose the nursing profession, who found the job suitable for them, and who were satisfied with the work life. Similarly, in their study, Sabancıoğulları & Dogan (2014) found that nurses who willingly chose the profession and who are satisfied with the profession at present have a higher overall PSCIN mean score. Karadag et al. (2004) found similar results in their study. This result indicates the importance of conscious choice of nursing profession and promotion of the profession to make an informed choice.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study indicate that the professional self of nurses is at a moderate level. According to these findings, it cannot be said that the nurses' professional self is at a very positive level. In addition, the level of professional self-concept of nurses is affected by gender, age, clinic, working style and working position. In the study, the professional self-development of nurses who chose the nursing profession voluntarily, who found the profession suitable for them, and who were satisfied with the work life was found to be higher. For this reason, executive nurses can plan professional self-development training programs, especially for nurses who are newly graduated, younger, in the first years of the working life, who work in shifts and who have low educational level. This study evaluated the level of professional self-development of nurses working only in public hospitals. It is recommended to compare the results by conducting studies that determine the level of professional self-development and affecting factors of nurses working in private hospitals in the future.

**Limitations:** The data obtained from the study are from the nurses working in just one hospital. Research data are based on verbal statements of nurses. This study was subject to some limitations that may have affected the results. First, the results lack generalizability because the study sample was comprised of only Turkish



nurses. Secondly, the results from this study may have been affected by the fact that it was conducted in only one setting. For future studies, it can be recommended that different settings be used to explore this topic further.

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