

Original Article

Nursing Students' Perspectives on the Present and Future of the Nursing Profession: Emotions, Thoughts, and Expectations

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Abstract

Objective: This study aimed to explore the emotions, thoughts, and expectations of senior nursing students concerning the current state and future of the nursing profession.

Methods: This qualitative study utilized the document analysis method. Data were collected from 40 senior nursing students enrolled during the 2023-2024 academic year at the Faculty of Health Sciences of a university in southern Turkey. The students' letters were analyzed using content analysis via MAXQDA software. Institutional approval, ethical clearance from a university's Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, and informed consent (both verbal and written) from the participants were obtained.

Results: The mean age of the participants was 22.00±1.14 years (range: 20-25). Of the participants, 67.5% were female, 60% chose nursing willingly, and 10% selected the profession for other reasons (e.g., ease of employment, job opportunities). Content analysis identified two main themes (nursing students' professional experiences and thoughts on the nursing profession in the future) and six sub-themes.

Conclusion: Senior nursing students predominantly demonstrated positive perceptions and emotions toward the nursing profession, with many expressing a hopeful picture for its future. Given the potential influence of such positive attitudes on patient care quality, fostering these perceptions among senior students is of significant importance. Educational strategies aimed at cultivating positive professional attitudes are recommended. Furthermore, similar studies should be conducted across different academic levels and in multicenter settings.

Keywords: Nursing, qualitative research, nursing students

Introduction

The dynamic and ever-evolving healthcare sector remains a cornerstone in addressing society's fundamental needs. Within this framework, nursing occupies a central position due to its multifaceted roles and responsibilities (Buchan & Catton, 2023). Nurses perform critical functions, ranging from direct patient care and health education to emergency interventions and the management of chronic diseases (International Council of Nurses, 2023). However, the appeal of the nursing profession has been steadily declining in developed countries (Adhikari & Smith, 2023). Nursing students' perceptions of their career prospects and professional values are closely associated with their intention to pursue and remain within the nursing profession (Sonmez et al., 2019). While existing studies have examined nursing students' willingness to engage in the profession, their scope remains relatively limited (Talman et al., 2024; Cilar et al., 2020; Lemiecha & Leńczuk-Gruba, 2020).

The characteristics of nursing students can significantly influence their motivation to choose and complete nursing education. Key determinants—categorized as restrictive, attractive, and intrinsic motivations—play a crucial role in students' decisions to pursue nursing as both an academic discipline and a professional career path (Van Iersel et al., 2016). During or following their education, a disparity often emerges between students' initial expectations of the profession and the realities of training or working conditions. This gap can result in dissatisfaction and attrition. Physical, mental, social, and economic challenges, alongside a lack of psychosocial support and the demanding nature of nursing education, contribute significantly to students' decisions to discontinue their studies (Ten Hoeve et al., 2016; Bakker et al., 2019; Talman et al., 2024). Notably, recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the perceived sanctity and critical importance of the nursing profession, which has, in turn, influenced students' career intentions and reshaped their outlook on nursing as a whole (Lin et al., 2021; Stanley & Kay, 2024). While

this heightened perception strengthens students' intrinsic motivation, it also exposes them to adverse outcomes, such as burnout and emotional vulnerability (Stanley & Kay, 2024). Furthermore, the ongoing shortage of nursing graduates to meet workforce demands exacerbates these challenges, increasing burnout and dissatisfaction among practicing nurses. This issue not only affects the well-being of nurses but also compromises patient care quality and contributes to rising rates of morbidity and mortality (Lin et al., 2021). Although research exploring the factors that influence students' choices of nursing as a profession and their perceptions of its present and future status exists, these studies remain insufficient in scope and comprehensiveness. There is a clear need for further research that investigates these issues from a multi-faceted and in-depth perspective (Talman et al., 2024).

Gaining a deeper understanding of the emotions, thoughts, and expectations of nursing students as future practitioners is vital for improving retention rates, enhancing educational quality, and shaping the future trajectory of healthcare services. Nursing students' perceptions of the profession, their motivational factors, and their expectations provide valuable insights for stakeholders involved in curriculum design, professional practices, and workforce planning. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of nursing students' perspectives and expectations regarding the nursing profession. By doing so, it seeks to illuminate areas for improvement in nursing education and inform future strategies for advancing professional practice. The findings of this research are anticipated to make significant contributions to the evolution of nursing education and practice while fostering improvements in overall healthcare service delivery.

Method

Aim and Design of the Study: This study employs document analysis, a qualitative research method, to investigate nursing students' emotions, thoughts, and expectations regarding the current state and future of the nursing profession. Conducted with senior nursing students at a university in

southern Turkey, the study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the profession's present conditions and their projections for its evolution over the next decade.

Data Collection: The research was conducted with senior nursing students enrolled in the Faculty of Health Sciences at a university in southern Turkey. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were involved in the study, which took place between October 2, 2023, and February 9, 2024. Data were collected using a structured form comprising three sociodemographic questions (age, gender, and reasons for choosing the nursing profession) and two open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' emotions, thoughts, and expectations through letter-writing. The questions included:

1. Could you write a letter describing your current perspective on the nursing profession, including your emotions, thoughts, and perceptions?
2. Could you write a letter expressing your feelings, thoughts, and expectations about where and how you envision the nursing profession in 10 years? (Please imagine the future.)

Following the acquisition of both verbal and written consent from participants, researchers provided clear instructions for the letter-writing process in line with the study criteria.

All participating student nurses completed the letters voluntarily, and none withdrew from the study. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, ensuring no new information emerged. The final sample comprised 40 senior nursing students, aged 18 and above, who were proficient in reading and writing Turkish, voluntarily participated, and were enrolled in the final year of the nursing program during the 2023-2024 academic year. The collected letters were subsequently digitized to create a raw dataset for further analysis. This method enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' personal reflections and projections, offering valuable insights into their understanding of the nursing profession both now and in the foreseeable future.

Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using content analysis, a widely recognized qualitative research technique. The student nurses' letters were transcribed into Word files to produce a raw textual dataset. Each researcher independently analyzed the data utilizing MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. To ensure the credibility of the findings, perspectives from two experts in qualitative research were sought during the analysis process. Codes and themes were identified through consensus among the researchers (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; Creswell, 2015).

Table 1. Main Themes and Sub-themes Derived from Data Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Student Nurses' Experiences with the Profession	1. Perceptions of the Profession 2. Emotions toward the Profession 3. Qualities of a Good Nurse 4. Sources of Motivation
Theme 2: Thoughts on the Nursing Profession in the Future	1. A Hopeful Picture 2. A Hopeless Picture

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to established ethical guidelines and principles. Institutional approval was secured from the relevant university, and ethical clearance was granted by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Approval Date: 29.05.2023; Decision No: 59). Participants were provided with detailed

information about the study, and their verbal and written informed consent was obtained in line with the principles of voluntary participation and autonomy.

Validity and Reliability: To enhance the rigor of this qualitative study, four key criteria—credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability—were

carefully applied throughout the research process. Credibility was ensured by collecting data from a substantial sample of senior nursing students and involving multiple researchers in the data analysis process, thereby strengthening the robustness of the findings. Confirmability was enhanced by supporting the results and interpretations with direct quotations from participants' letters, which ensured transparency and alignment with their authentic perspectives. Reliability was bolstered through researcher triangulation, as multiple researchers participated in both data collection and analysis to minimize bias and maintain consistency. Finally, transferability was achieved by providing a detailed description of the study sample and the participants' characteristics, allowing other researchers to evaluate the applicability of the findings in different contexts. By adhering to these criteria, the study achieves a high level of methodological rigor, offering valuable insights into senior nursing students' perceptions of the current state and future of the nursing profession.

Findings

The average age of the students who participated in the study was 22.00 ± 1.14 (minimum = 20, maximum = 25). It was determined that 67.5% of the participants were female and 22.5% were male. Regarding the reasons for choosing the nursing profession, 60% reported selecting it based on their own preference, 17.5% indicated that their choice was influenced by both their own preference and their family's, 12.5% chose the profession due to their family's preference, and 10% selected it for other reasons, such as ease of placement and employment opportunities.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, which resulted in the identification of two main themes reflecting the student nurses' experiences with the profession and thoughts on the nursing profession in the future. These main themes were further categorized into six subthemes, as presented in Table 1.

Theme 1: Student Nurses' Experiences with the Profession

This theme encompasses four subthemes: perceptions of the profession, emotions toward nursing, qualities of a good nurse, and sources of motivation.

Perceptions of the Profession

The students' perceptions of the nursing profession reflected both positive and negative dimensions, with positive perceptions being more prevalent. Positive perceptions included concepts such as helping others, practicing self-sacrifice, instilling hope, providing support, making a difference in people's lives, and saving lives. Students also described nursing as a sacred profession that adopts a holistic approach, fosters education, ensures high job availability, and requires strong commitment.

On the other hand, negative perceptions were primarily associated with the challenges inherent to the profession. These challenges included excessive responsibility, a heavy workload, stress and fatigue, exposure to violence, difficulties in maintaining personal health, and a lack of societal recognition for the profession.

Some representative statements reflecting the students' positive perceptions of the nursing profession are as follows:

"Nursing, primarily represents self-sacrifice for me, and it played a crucial role in my decision to choose this profession, as it is one of the main fields that is beneficial to others. I enjoy helping sick people, empathizing with their emotions, sharing their struggles and, at times, their joy. Nursing is not just a profession for me, but also an aspect of my life that makes it easier, provides me with knowledge about health, and broadens my horizons."
(K21)

"This profession offers the opportunity to be there for people during their most difficult times, to support them, and to instill hope."
(K2)

"I chose nursing myself, and to me, it is a sacred profession." (K28)

"Nursing involves providing holistic care and offering support during patients' treatment process." (K38)

"I chose this field because I believe I will have high job prospects after graduation, and I decided to pursue it." (K35)

Some of the statements reflecting students' negative perceptions of the nursing profession are as follows:

"I have observed that the general perception of the nursing profession is that it is looked down upon, with the assumption that we are merely administering injections. However, nurses have many responsibilities, and their workloads are heavy. We are not only concerned with treating a patient's illness but adopt a holistic approach to their care." (K8)

"I think nursing is a very difficult profession that does not receive the recognition it deserves. It is not a profession I would ever want to pursue. In Turkey, I pursued this degree mainly because I did not want to remain unemployed. The job has heavy workload and long working hours, which are undesirable. Of course, every profession has its challenges, but I do not believe nurses live a decent life." (K24)

"I don't think the nursing profession is in a good place right now. The recent pessimistic news in the country, attitudes towards healthcare workers, violence, the lack of adequate compensation, both financially and emotionally, long working hours, and other issues have contributed to this feeling." (K37)

"However, despite all the efforts and labor, I do not think we see rewarding results, either financially or emotionally. For example, the violence against healthcare workers, the lack of essential equipment like X-

ray machines in some hospitals, and threats to our safety have made me reconsider. If I had the chance to choose again, taking into account the difficulties of nursing and my personal safety, I would never choose this profession again." (K4)

Emotions toward the Profession

Many of the students expressed positive feelings about nursing and being a nurse, including happiness, peace, pride, respect, excitement, and love. Fewer students shared negative feelings such as sadness, fear, disappointment, and anxiety. One student nurse mentioned that they did not have any particular feelings about the profession.

"Helping people, being a voice for their feelings, and being able to touch their lives, even in a small way, makes me feel incredibly happy and proud." (K28)

"I am proud to be by their side during the difficult process they are going through." (K32)

"For me, nursing is an honor. I believe it is a profession I will pursue with passion, and I truly love what I do." (K25)

"Despite all the challenges, the profession offers us the unique opportunity to touch people's lives and make a real difference, which makes me grateful I chose this path." (K2)

"At times, I have felt regret, but overall, I have always been very happy. Communicating with patients and helping them brings me a sense of deep happiness. I feel I was made for this job. Although the workload can be overwhelming, my love for the profession makes it easier." (K11)

"My dreams before choosing this profession were very different from what I have experienced. Therefore, I can say I am somewhat disappointed." (K27)

"I am saddened and frustrated that nursing is often perceived simply as a profession where you give injections or administer serum, without understanding its full scope or value. The more I experience the profession, the more I realize its importance, but I feel it does not receive the recognition it deserves." (K20)

"...I do have some fears for the future, such as feelings of inadequacy and the fear of making a mistake in treatment. However, I stay extremely careful when administering treatments and medications. I have always had a positive view of nursing since childhood, but concerns about possible harassment in difficult environments, like mobbing, do cause me anxiety." (K19)

"Unfortunately, I don't feel any particular emotion toward the profession." (K13)

Qualities of a Good Nurse

According to the student nurses, a good nurse should love their profession, be able to empathize, be sensitive and understanding, provide holistic care, and demonstrate self-sacrifice, politeness, patience, compassion, and competence. However, some of the student nurses expressed concerns that nurses do not possess these qualities and do not love their profession.

"This profession requires patience, empathy, and endurance." (K32)

"Nursing requires not only knowledge and skills but also understanding and empathy towards people." (K2)

"Nursing is a profession with a great deal of responsibility, and these responsibilities make it more challenging. It needs to be pursued with passion, and nurses must possess strong social skills." (K8)

"From my personal experience, nurses do not seem to love their profession and claim to continue out of obligation. A person who doesn't love their profession cannot be

effective at it. They show no interest in patients, merely handling medication duties. Many belittle and humiliate patients, and the patients' needs and desires are ignored. These are my observations." (K34)

"Although topics like understanding, tolerance, and teachability are briefly addressed in school, I believe these core values do not sufficiently impact nurses, as I observe a competence problem in many of them. In my view, these human values form the foundation of competence in nursing." (K14)

Sources of Motivation

Many students mentioned that contributing to patients' recovery, receiving positive feedback, witnessing a small smile, and seeing the patients' sense of gratitude are key sources of motivation for them.

"Seeing the sense of gratitude in the patients' eyes and words reminds me that choosing this profession was the right decision." (K30)

"Every day during my internship, when I see a patient's smile or observe my effort to alleviate their pain, my commitment to the profession increases even more." (K2)

"The profession is exhausting and demanding, but when we receive positive feedback from patients, we forget a bit of the fatigue. Receiving prayers, especially, is an amazing feeling, and these kinds of responses enhance our belief and love for the profession." (K28)

"Some days we might feel overwhelmed or exhausted due to our responsibilities. However, a small smile, a thank you, or a recovery story during patient care makes us forget all the challenges and provides us with motivation." (K39)

Theme 2: Thoughts on the Nursing Profession in the Future

Student nurses' thoughts about the future of the nursing profession can be categorized into two sub-themes: a hopeful picture and a hopeless one.

A Hopeful Picture

Many students believe that the nursing profession will eventually receive the value it deserves, that the roles of nurses will expand, technological advancements will positively influence patient care, nurses will take more active roles in preventive healthcare, holistic care will be provided, and the nursing profession will have a more developed profile. They also mentioned an increase in the number of specialized nurses and the presence of more knowledgeable and educated nurses.

"I believe that nursing will remain an important profession in 10 years, just as it is today. Moreover, I think that nurses will become better educated, more knowledgeable, and more prominent. I also think they will have better working conditions than today. I see it as a profession whose importance will be understood by the public." (K15)

"In 10 years, I believe nursing will be much more developed. Currently, regardless of their education levels, nurses are placed in managerial positions in hospitals. In the coming years, I expect specialist nurses to take more managerial positions. I also think that every branch and department will include specialist nurses." (K5)

"Public health and patient satisfaction will be prioritized. Nurses will not only treat illnesses, but also play an active role in raising awareness in the community, providing health education, and delivering preventive healthcare services." (K16)

"I believe we will receive the value we deserve because the new generation

will be individuals who advocate for themselves and their profession. I also think that with the advancement of technology, our workload will decrease." (K7)

"Ultimately, when I think about the future of nursing, I draw a hopeful picture. Technology and innovation will allow nurses to provide better patient care, enhance community health, and become a more professional profession." (K2)

Five nursing students also pointed out that to further develop the profession, preventing violence and ensuring personal safety are crucial.

"I wish to practice my profession in 10 years in a more advanced, valued, and safe environment. I hope that ensuring our personal safety will no longer be just a dream, but a reality." (K4)

"As the need for this profession increases, I'm certain it will progress further, provided the safety of healthcare professionals is guaranteed, and they are made to feel valued." (K28)

It was also observed that student nurses have made plans for their academic careers, with some expressing their interest in pursuing postgraduate education.

"I see myself as a nurse at X City Hospital in 10 years with 8-9 years of experience, and I envision myself having completed a master's degree. I may see myself as someone who has worn down due to the profession, but I'll still be a nurse who loves their job. Because touching people's lives will always be very important to me." (K31)

"I think that in 10 years, I will be working as a faculty member at our school, God willing. However, I would like to work in a hospital setting first to help people. I want to

improve myself in my field and progress to higher levels." (K25)

A Hopeless Picture

Fewer students expressed that they do not want to work as nurses in Turkey, but rather wish to work abroad. They believe that the profession will not receive the value it deserves, that negative factors such as violence in healthcare and working conditions will remain unchanged, and that nurses will become even more dissatisfied.

"I don't think this system will change much because, in my opinion, the only difference between now and 10 years ago is technological advancements. In fact, I believe that due to the decline in the quality of people and respect, there will be nurses who are even more unhappy with their jobs." (K5)

"I don't want to be a nurse in 10 years, I'm sure of that. My thoughts about nursing will not change even after 10 years. But I hope that in 10 years, we will be a society that realizes nursing is not just about injections, but a profession that deserves respect." (K24)

"In 10 years, I see myself abroad, holding a green passport, at least there I may be able to practice my profession under better conditions. And when I eventually leave the profession, I might be able to continue my life under better conditions. Because if we look at the conditions in our country, this is not possible in Turkey." (K27)

Discussion

In this qualitative study, conducted to explore senior nursing students' perceptions, thoughts, and expectations regarding the current state and future of the nursing profession, two main themes and six sub-themes were identified. The analysis and discussion of the students' responses are presented within this framework.

Theme 1: Student Nurses' Experiences with the Nursing Profession

This theme comprises four sub-themes: perceptions of the profession, emotions toward the profession, qualities of a good nurse, and sources of motivation.

The findings revealed that nursing students held both positive and negative perceptions of the profession, with positive views being more prevalent. The students highlighted several positive attributes associated with the nursing profession, including helping others, self-sacrifice, instilling hope, providing support, making a difference in people's lives, and saving lives. Additional descriptions characterized nursing as a sacred profession, offering a holistic approach, fostering education, ensuring high employment opportunities, and demanding a strong sense of commitment. These findings align with previous studies in the literature. For instance, Ozmen and Cetinkaya (2016) reported that senior nursing students predominantly expressed positive descriptions of the profession through statements and drawings, often including symbols such as "smiling faces, positivity, the sun, angels, wisdom, heart, and knowledge." Similarly, Bilgehan and İnkaya (2021) found that nursing students generally perceived the profession in a positive light. Moreover, Swarna (2015) indicated that 85% of nursing students regarded the profession as honorable and respectable. Such positive perceptions are believed to enhance job satisfaction, foster motivation, facilitate professional identity development, and ultimately improve the quality of patient care.

Conversely, the study also revealed students' negative perceptions of nursing, primarily focusing on its demanding and challenging nature. These perceptions included excessive responsibilities, heavy workloads, stress, fatigue, exposure to violence, difficulties in maintaining personal health, and a lack of societal recognition for nursing. Similar findings were reported by Mai et al. (2018), who found that while most nursing students held positive views of the profession, others described it as stressful, monotonous, and overly dependent on physicians, with limited societal respect. Neumbe et al. (2023) further emphasized the traumatic and demanding

aspects of nursing, pointing to personal safety threats and occupational hazards. The negative perceptions expressed in this study could be attributed to individual interest in the profession, negative experiences during clinical training, and the intensified working conditions observed during the pandemic. These perceptions are particularly significant, as they may adversely affect students' academic performance, professional development, job satisfaction, and the quality of nursing care provided.

The study also examined students' emotional responses toward nursing. Most students reported experiencing positive emotions, such as happiness, peace, pride, respect, excitement, and love for the profession. A smaller group, however, described negative emotions, including sadness, fear, disappointment, and anxiety. Notably, one participant mentioned feeling neutral about the profession. These findings resonate with prior research. Oner and Sarikaya Karabudak (2021) noted that nursing students experienced a combination of positive emotions—such as happiness, empathy, and compassion—and negative emotions, including anger, sadness, helplessness, and feelings of inadequacy during clinical practice. Importantly, the same study highlighted that negative emotions were often more pronounced. These mixed emotional experiences underscore the complex nature of nursing, where both fulfillment and emotional challenges coexist.

In the sub-theme addressing the qualities of a good nurse, students emphasized characteristics such as loving the profession, being empathetic, sensitive, understanding, and providing holistic care. Additional qualities included self-sacrifice, politeness, patience, compassion, and professional competence. These findings are consistent with existing literature. Aydin Er et al. (2017) highlighted that nursing students associated good nursing with professional competence, cheerfulness, patience, calmness, and dedication to the profession. Similarly, Akpınar et al. (2019) found that nursing students, regardless of their year of study, most frequently described a good nurse as

“competent in their profession” and emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and effective communication. Furthermore, Taskiran et al. (2020) identified patience and strong communication skills as essential qualities in nursing. From the patients' perspective, Najafi et al. (2014) reported that patients expect nurses to exhibit kindness, responsibility, discipline, and respect for dignity. Tosunoz et al. (2021) also described good nurses as patient, cheerful, empathetic, and trustworthy. The alignment between the students' descriptions of a good nurse and the expectations of patients and the broader literature suggests that nursing students have internalized key professional values and developed a strong sense of professional awareness. This awareness is likely to contribute to the adoption of ethical principles, professional development, and improvements in the quality of care provided.

The final sub-theme focused on the sources of motivation for nursing students. Many participants identified contributing to patient recovery, receiving positive feedback, and witnessing gratitude—such as a simple smile—as key motivational factors. Similar findings have been documented in prior research. Lindberg et al. (2020) reported that nursing students derived motivation from providing patient care, interacting with patients and families, and performing meaningful work. Likewise, Subu et al. (2022) noted that helping others served as a critical source of motivation among nursing students. The patient-centered nature of these motivational factors reflects empathy, intrinsic motivation, and professional commitment, which are known to positively influence job satisfaction and the quality of patient care. In summary, this study highlights both the positive and negative experiences of senior nursing students regarding the nursing profession. It further underscores their understanding of the qualities of a good nurse and their sources of motivation, emphasizing the role these factors play in shaping their professional identity, commitment, and overall contribution to the field of nursing.

Theme 2: Thoughts on the Nursing Profession in the Future

Two sub-themes were identified regarding student nurses' perspectives on the future of the nursing profession: a hopeful picture and a hopeless picture.

Our study revealed that many students envision a promising future for the nursing profession. They anticipate greater recognition for nurses, expanded professional roles, and the positive influence of technological advancements on patient care. Furthermore, students foresee nurses playing a more active role in preventive healthcare, providing holistic care, and contributing to the evolution of nursing into a more advanced and specialized discipline. Anticipated developments also include an increase in the number of specialized nurses, higher levels of education, and enhanced knowledge among nursing professionals. These findings are supported by previous research. Bozkul et al. (2022) reported that nursing students expected the profession to gain greater value in the future, characterized by expanded opportunities, improved working conditions, and a growing workforce. Similarly, Lindberg et al. (2020) found that nursing students had optimistic views of their profession and expressed enthusiasm for their future roles. Ozciftci et al. (2022) highlighted nursing students' recognition of the growing educational level within the profession, with some participants anticipating greater specialization in nursing within the next decade.

The aspects of the profession that instill optimism—such as improved recognition, working conditions, and expanded roles—reflect areas where current challenges persist. It is believed that this optimism positively influences students' academic motivation, openness to professional development and learning, and job satisfaction. Notably, many students in our study expressed aspirations to pursue postgraduate education, suggesting their intent to further their academic careers. This aligns with findings from Gunawan et al. (2018), where over half of the nursing students indicated a desire to pursue advanced degrees, such as master's programs, after completing their undergraduate education. Similarly, Aydin et al. (2021) found that

31.7% of 2,818 final-year nursing students envisioned themselves as academics within the next decade. Such aspirations likely reflect students' positive perceptions, professional commitment, and openness to lifelong learning. Supporting students in achieving these goals through mentorship and career counseling is crucial for developing a well-educated and skilled nursing workforce.

Conversely, a smaller group of students expressed a pessimistic picture regarding the future of the nursing profession. These students indicated a preference for practicing nursing abroad rather than in Turkey, citing concerns that the profession would continue to suffer from lack of recognition, workplace violence, and unsatisfactory working conditions. These challenges, they believe, would perpetuate dissatisfaction and discourage nurses from fully committing to the profession. This perspective aligns with findings from Gençbas et al. (2024), where 82.9% of student nurses expressed a preference to work abroad. Similarly, Taskiran et al. (2020) reported that 85.1% of final-year nursing students harbored concerns about their future careers, with 44.0% attributing their worries to poor working conditions. Ozciftci et al. (2022) further noted that some nursing students did not expect significant structural changes within the profession over the next decade, indicating a lack of optimism for its future development. The hopeless picture observed among some nursing students may stem from dissatisfaction with current educational environments, working conditions, and the perceived undervaluation of the nursing profession. This highlights the importance of addressing these issues to prevent further demoralization of the future nursing workforce.

Limitations: A limitation of this study is that it was conducted at a single center and only with final-year nursing students.

Conclusion and Recommendations: This study examined the feelings, thoughts, and expectations of final-year nursing students regarding the current state and future of the nursing profession. The findings revealed that the majority of students held predominantly

positive perceptions and emotions toward nursing, with many expressing a hopeful picture for the profession's future. However, some students conveyed negative perceptions, highlighting issues such as excessive workload, exposure to violence, and the lack of societal recognition for nursing. Negative emotions, including sadness, fear, disappointment, and anxiety, were also reported. Additionally, a sense of hopelessness was noted among certain students, who believed that nursing would not achieve the recognition it deserves and that ongoing challenges, such as violence in healthcare and poor working conditions, would persist, leading to increasing dissatisfaction among nurses. Given the significant impact of positive perceptions and emotions on the quality of patient care, it is crucial to foster positive attitudes and feelings toward the profession among final-year nursing students. To achieve this, educational strategies should be implemented to enhance students' perceptions and emotional connections with nursing. Furthermore, conducting similar studies at various educational levels and across multiple institutions is recommended to provide a broader understanding of these issues and inform targeted interventions.

What Does This Study Contribute to the Literature?

- Understanding student nurses' emotions, thoughts, and expectations toward the profession is crucial for improving the quality of education and the quality of nursing care.
- This study found that final-year nursing students had more positive perceptions and emotions toward the nursing profession, and many painted a hopeful picture for the future of the profession.
- The results of this qualitative study are expected to guide the future planning of nursing education and practice.

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