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Professional values in Turkish undergraduate nursing students and its reflection on caring behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Aim: Professional values and caring are important for nursing professionals. The purpose of this study was to determine professional values in undergraduate nursing students and its reflection on care behaviours.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used. The study sample consisted of first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year undergraduate students ($n = 351$) studying for the Bachelor of Nursing Science Degree at the University of Giresun, Turkey. The data was collected by the researchers using the demographic form for students, 'Nursing Professional Value Scale' and 'Caring Assessment Questionnaire-Care-Q'.

Results: A positive correlation was found to be statistically significant between nursing students' professional values and care behaviours ($r = 0.423$, $p < 0.05$). Statistical analysis showed that there was a significant difference statistically between classes in terms of nursing students' care behaviours ($p < 0.05$), while no statistically significant differences were found between classes in terms of nursing students' professional values ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusion: The current study showed that caring behaviours were affected by the professional values of nursing students. Furthermore, it was observed that nursing students who have stronger orientations towards professional values show a higher frequency of caring behaviour.

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Introduction

Professional values are conceptualized both as standards that define professional behaviour, principles and ideals that influence moral judgement, and give meaning and

direction to clinical practice [1]. These values include respect for human dignity and privacy, protection from harm, and personal and professional responsibility and accountability [2]. Values in nursing encompass not only what is considered important for recipients of nursing services, but also provide an appreciation for what is

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considered most important to the professional nurse [3]. The valuing process promotes critical thinking, empathy, communication and relationships with others. Therefore, developing professional values is a significant factor in improving nursing practice [4].

Many of the original professional values conceptualized by Nightingale and passed down through the role modelling of generations of nurses are still relevant to contemporary nursing [5]. The expectation that nurses provide compassionate care to patients remains a universal professional value [6, 7]. A literature review conducted by Shahrari et al. [8] identified that respecting patients' dignity was the most frequently reported nursing value in twelve of the included articles; and social justice, through ensuring equitable and just care, was the most frequently reported in eight of the articles. Other professional values included altruism, kindness, empathy, responsibility, honesty, and professional competency. The review identified that these values were similar across cultures, providing evidence of the humanistic orientation of the nursing profession internationally [6, 8].

Acquiring professional values is central to the professional development of nurses. Nursing professional values result in enhanced patient care and greater job satisfaction among nurses, and consequently increased clients' recognition and nurse retention [9]. Developing professional values is therefore an important aspect in nursing education. One of the nursing internalization values is the concept of caring that is a universal phenomenon, however, the processes and patterns of this concept vary among cultures [10]. Caring has been described as the 'essence' of nursing [11]. In today's world, nursing is seen as the science of caring, and there is an increasing drive to maintain human caring ideology and human caring ideals, especially in light of new technology and aggressive treatments [12]. Loke et al. [13] identified that compassion and an ability to respond with humanity and kindness to others' pain, distress, anxiety or needs has long been regarded a critical core professional value of care in nursing profession. Caring is also a vital part of nursing professionalism and capacity of nursing students [11–14].

There have been a number of studies on the content of professional values. Yarbrough et al. [15] recommended that professional values include respect for human dignity, protection of patient privacy, protection from harm, and personal and professional responsibility and accountability. Shaw and Degazon [16] recommended core professional nursing values, including altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity and social justice, and emphasized student integration of professional nursing values. Although several studies focus on professional values among nursing students in the literature [17–19], there has been little research on the effect of nursing students' professional values on caring behaviours. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between professional values and caring behaviours among nursing students. It was expected that the research would show that professional values are a predictor of caring behaviours and that the nursing curriculum needs to promote students' professional values.

Material and methods

Design and sample

A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used to determine professional values in undergraduate nursing students and its reflection on care behaviours. The study sample consisted of first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year undergraduate students studying for the Bachelor of Nursing Science Degree at the University of Giresun. 351 nursing students were enrolled in the study. In this study, sampling was not used and all students who chose to participate were included.

Instruments

The data were collected by the researchers using the demographic form for students, 'Nursing Professional Value Scale' and 'Caring Assessment Questionnaire-Care-Q'. The demographic form included the socio-demographic characteristics of the students. *The Nursing Professional Value Scale*, which was developed by Weis and Schank [20] was used to measure nursing professional values. Its validity and reliability in a Turkish setting was tested by Orak and Alpar [21]. The instrument is composed of 31 items representing five factors of human dignity, responsibility, activism, security and autonomy. Nursing students indicated the importance of each item by using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 meant "not important" and 5 meant "most important". These categories were scored 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively. The possible range of scores was between 44 and 220. Higher scores indicated stronger orientations to professional values [21].

The Caring Assessment Questionnaire (Care-Q) was developed by Patricia Jean Larson in 1981 and was the first quantitative care assessment tool [22]. The original questionnaire consists of 50 caring behaviours generated from the results of Larson's inductive work on caring. These behaviours are presented in six subscales including: 'accessible' (6 items), 'monitors and follows through' (8 items), 'trusting relationship' (16 items), 'anticipates' (5 items), 'comforts' (9 items) and 'explains and facilitates' (6 items). The responses given to the phrases of the scale are ranked with a 7-point Likert type scale: 1 (Never), 2 (Almost never), 3 (Rarely), 4 (Sometimes), 5 (Usually), 6 (Almost always), 7 (Always). The possible range of scores was between 50 and 350. Higher scores indicated a higher frequency of caring behaviour and positive care perception [22].

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Ataturk University, Erzurum, Turkey. The study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines set out in the Declaration of Helsinki, and written consent was obtained from the director of the faculty. Students' participation was voluntary. Before distribution, all participants were informed of the purpose

and design of the study and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The authors also explained that participation would have no influence on school life or grades.

Data collection

In this study, the data were collected during the 2015 and 2016 academic period. After written consent was obtained from the director of the institution, the questionnaires were administered to each of the classes one-by-one during their training in the spring semester. Before it was applied, verbal permission was obtained from the lecturer responsible for the lesson. The questionnaires were distributed to the students during class time and collected immediately after completion. The questionnaire took 20–25 min to complete.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Chicago, IL) for Windows version 21.0 was used for data entry and analysis. Nursing students' demographic variables, care behaviours, and professional values were evaluated using the percentage distribution and mean. To make a comparison of the means of the variables, the Pearson

Correlation test was used. Variance analyses (ANOVA) were used to evaluate the difference of the average points of the classes between scales. A *p*-value below 0.05 was considered to indicate a statistically significant difference.

Results

Sample characteristics

The nursing students' socio-demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. Three hundred and fifty one (351) undergraduate students completed the questionnaire. The mean age of the students was 20.51 years, with a standard deviation of 1.77 years. The majority of the sample was female (78.3%). Out of 351 students in the nursing programme, 116 (33%) were first year students, 97 (27.6%) were second-year students, 79 (22.5%) were third-year students and 59 (16.8%) were fourth-year students. The majority of the students (74.6%) had information about the nursing profession before deciding to be a nurse and willingly chose the nursing profession. As shown in Table 1, half of the students reported that they would like to work in health care institutions after graduation. In the study, around 85% of the students stated that their primary task was care.

Table 1 – Socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students (N = 351)

Age, years (Mean ± SD)	20.51 ± 1.77	
	N	%
Gender		
Female	275	78.3
Male	76	21.7
Class		
First class	116	33.0
Second class	97	27.6
Third class	79	22.5
Fourth class	59	16.8
Have information about the profession before deciding to be a nurse		
Yes	262	74.6
No	89	25.4
Willingly chose the nursing profession		
Yes	262	74.6
No	89	25.4
The field that students would like to work in after graduation		
Work in health care institutions	177	50.4
Have an academic career in the nursing profession	124	35.3
Training in a different department	20	5.7
Changing department without graduating	8	2.3
Being an educator in a nursing vocational high school	15	4.3
Being a police officer or soldier	2	0.6
Working as a specialist nurse after graduating from Master's programme	4	1.1
Undecided	1	0.3
The satisfaction level with training in the nursing department		
Very satisfied	118	33.6
Somewhat satisfied	214	61.0
Not satisfied	19	5.4
Having a vision that care is the primary task of a nurse		
Yes	297	84.6
No	54	15.4

Relationship between professional values and care behaviours

The comparison of the mean of the scales is presented in Table 2. The mean scores of professional values and care behaviour were 127.8 ± 20.18 and 5.4 ± 0.90 , respectively. A positive correlation was found to be statistically significant between nursing students' professional values and care behaviours ($r = 0.423$, $p < 0.05$). It was found that their care behaviours increased if the scores of nursing students' professional values were higher in the study (Table 2).

Table 2 – The comparison of the nursing students' professional values and care behaviour

	Professional values	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Care behaviour	0.423 ^a	0.000

^a Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistical analysis showed that there was a significant statistical difference between classes in terms of nursing students' care behaviours ($p < 0.05$), while no statistically significant differences were found between classes in terms of nursing students' professional values ($p > 0.05$) (Table 3). Despite this lack of difference, it was found that nursing students' professional values decreased in 2nd year students ($p > 0.05$), and their care behaviours were lower than 1st, 3rd and 4th year students ($p < 0.05$). When the scales were compared within classes, the difference between nursing students' professional values and care behaviours was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4).

Discussion

Caring is the essence of nursing and the core of nursing education. Nursing students need to see the importance of caring reflected in specific teaching-learning objectives. This will provide a foundation for them to express caring in clinical practice. Studies have shown that caring and professional values can be improved through education [18, 23, 24]. Nevertheless, more evidence-based research on whether improved professional values will result in a more positive disposition toward caring behaviours is needed. The purpose of this study was to determine professional values in undergraduate nursing students and its reflection on care behaviours.

According to the findings of the current study, most of the participants expressed satisfaction with the nursing department (33.6% very satisfied; 61% somewhat satisfied), and 74.6% reported that they willingly chose the nursing profession. This was consistent with the result of a study by Yılmaz et al. [25] who examined the effect of the activity on the students' perception of the nursing profession. Three-quarters of the participants (72.3%) reported that they had chosen the nursing profession willingly. In a study by Zhang and Petrini [26], only slightly more than half (53.5%) of the 176 nursing students who participated had a positive attitude towards nursing. Therefore, continuous efforts are required to improve the image of nursing; nursing educators must address these issues in their encounters with nursing students through lectures and clinical practicums in order to empower their students to face these challenges [17, 27].

Little is known about the values nursing students bring with them upon admission to the discipline, or the professional values actually being assimilated by the

Table 3 – The comparison of the scales between classes

	Mean \pm SD				Statistical evaluation
	1st year students	2nd year students	3rd year students	4th year students	
Professional values	124.8 \pm 19.11	122.3 \pm 16.38	126.0 \pm 15.54	127.8 \pm 20.18	$F = 1.285$ $p > 0.05$
Care behaviour	5.56 \pm 0.89	5.23 \pm 0.78	5.53 \pm 0.68	5.43 \pm 0.90	$F = 3.230$ $p < 0.05$

Table 4 – The comparison of the scales within classes

	Mean \pm SD		Statistical evaluation
	Professional values	Care behaviours	
1st year students	124.8 \pm 19.11	5.56 \pm 0.89	$r = 0.315^a$ $p < 0.05$
2nd year students	122.3 \pm 16.38	5.23 \pm 0.78	$r = 0.485^a$ $p < 0.05$
3rd year students	126.0 \pm 15.54	5.53 \pm 0.68	$r = 0.548^a$ $p < 0.05$
4th year students	127.8 \pm 20.18	5.43 \pm 0.90	$r = 0.439^a$ $p < 0.05$

^a Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

time of graduation [28]. In this study, the difference of total professional value scores between classes was not statistically significant. Similarly, in a study conducted by Bang et al. [17], no difference was found in the total nursing professional value scores between sophomores and seniors. Moreover, it was found that there was a similar tendency for strengthening values as students progressed through their programmes. This was consistent with the results of the present study. Having nursing students acquire professional attitudes throughout their education for developing professional behaviour can be considered as the first step, because individuals' positive or negative attitudes towards any behaviour play an important role in whether they internalize or reject that behaviour [26, 29]. Furthermore, nursing students must comprehend professionalism and the criteria for professionalism in order for nursing to reach a professional status [26, 30, 31].

In the current study, higher scoring in caring behaviours was demonstrated amongst 1st and 3rd year students. The mean score amongst the final year students was lower. This is in agreement with a recent study in that based on student surveys the findings indicated a statistically significant reduction in the overall level of caring behaviour in first to final year students [13]. On the contrary, Zamanzadeh et al. [32] found that the 4th year students had higher mean values towards caring dimensions than 1st year students (without statistical significant difference). The current study findings could be connected with students trying to cope with the increasing complex nursing responsibilities related to caring.

In the present study, it was found that their care behaviours increased if the scores of nursing students' professional values were higher. Despite that lack of difference, it was found that nursing students' professional values decreased in 2nd year students, and their care behaviours were lower than 1st, 3rd and 4th year students ($p < 0.05$). This is consistent with Cohen's theory, which proposes that nursing students gradually develop the skills and values of the professional role through the educational or socialization process [33]. In this study, the mean levels of professional value and care behaviour were found to be lower in the students in the second class than those in the first, third, and fourth classes. One reason for this could be that the second class of students was for the first time intensively exposed to patient-illness oriented lessons, as well as to applied lessons. Another reason could be that the fourth class students had built up more self-confidence and gained sufficient awareness of their professions due to protective health care oriented lessons which took place as they were leaving their schools.

Study limitations

The findings of the present study need to be considered in light of several methodological limitations. The first limitation of the study concerns its generalizability. Restricting the study to one nursing department at a single institution limits the generalizability of the results. Studies on the role of gender in value formation need to include enough male students and need to be carried out qualitatively as well.

Conclusions

Professional values and caring are important for nursing professionals. In the fast-paced and complex health care environment, the core of nursing caring may be lost. However, over the past several years, the nursing profession has returned to emphasizing caring and that professional values can stimulate caring behaviour. This study explored the relationship between caring behaviour and professional values.

In conclusion, the findings indicated that the participants had chosen to enter the nursing profession of their own accord, they had given high preference to the profession, and they had positive conceptualizations of the profession. The current study shows that caring behaviours were affected by the professional values of nursing students. Furthermore, it has been observed that nursing students who have stronger orientations towards professional values show a higher frequency of caring behaviour. This study provided some insight into the views of Turkish nursing students in their own values and roles. The development of professional values requires the provision of correct information about nursing to adolescents, and the use of teaching and mentoring strategies for nursing students to assist them in caring behaviours.

Nursing educators must also be aware of how nursing student's view them as role models, and successfully promote professionalism in the field of nursing.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship with people or organizations that could inappropriately influence this work. No conflicting interests exist for any of the authors.

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