

## EXPERIENCES OF MEN IN NURSING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PERSPECTIVES OF NURSES

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the reasons for men to choose nursing as a profession in Turkey and their experiences in the profession from their perspectives. This is a qualitative study. The study sample consisted of male nurses working in a private hospital and in a public hospital of Ministry of Health in Turkey. The data were collected using a semi-structured in-depth interview questionnaire prepared based on literature. The study sample consisted of 11 male nurses. We used thematic analysis to analyse the data. Male nurses reported that the primary reason why they choose nursing as a career was job security. Male nurses also reported that especially female patients had negative perceptions and attitudes towards them and occasionally female patients refused to get health care services from them due to social norms. They were preferred in strength-related tasks rather than in care-related tasks.

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### INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination is a common phenomenon in professions across the world. Throughout history, nursing has been identified as a female profession. This gender perspective may have negative impacts on male students in their choice of nursing career. It also adversely affects the quality of health care. Hence, it is worth investigating the perception of patients and colleagues about males in nursing.

The rising demand for health care and the worldwide shortage of nurses has increased the need for more nurses and paved the way for male nurses. The number of male nurses has been increasing day by day. On the other hand, they encounter various problems and obstacles both in practice and society (Achora, 2016). They are assigned more physically demanding tasks. Besides, they experience resistance from patients while practicing nursing interventions (Rajacich, Kane, Williston, & Cameron, 2013). This situation causes a decrease in job satisfaction (Nasrabadi, Lipson, & Emami, 2004), and an increase in burnout among male nurses. Also, there are studies demonstrating that male nurses' intention to leave the job is high and their job performance is low (Aboshaiqah, Hamadi, Salem, & Zakari, 2016; Pan, Mao, Zhang, Wang, & Su, 2017). In clinical practices,

male nurses experience problems different than those their female colleagues do, which is mainly caused by the effects of gender roles in society. Male nurses generally encounter negative attitudes in certain areas such as gynecology and obstetric clinics (Yang, Gau, Shiao, Hu, & Shih, 2004).

### BACKGROUND

Nursing has been identified as a female profession throughout history, for it includes caring for patients with love and affection. As caring is assumed to be appropriate for women, nursing is introduced as a "female job". Modern nursing was founded by Florence Nightingale (Tunstall, 2016). The first school of nursing at bachelor's degree was established at Ege University in 1955 in Turkey. It was followed by Hacettepe University School of Nursing in Ankara and Florence Nightingale School of Nursing in İstanbul in 1961. The first master and doctorate programs in nursing were opened at Hacettepe University in 1968 and in 1972, respectively (Ökdem, Abbasoğlu, & Doğan, 2000; Torun, 2019).

In Turkey, the Nursing Law of 1954 stated that only Turkish women who had the title of the nurse within the provisions of this law were allowed to act the art of nursing (Turkey-Legal Gazette). With this article of the law, the fact that nursing was a female-specific

profession was also legally accepted by the government. This situation led to a delay for men entering the profession. As a matter of fact, the first male nurse, who graduated from Dokuz Eylül University School of Nursing in 1999, was not unfortunately allowed to work as a nurse by the law. After the amendment of the article in 2007, he continued his career as a male nurse, and nursing schools started admitting male students in Turkey (Armut, 2018).

Studies carried out about male nurses in Turkey has revealed that female patients with low education level and those who have not received patient care from a male nurse before have negative attitudes towards male nurses. Those patients also report that they feel uncomfortable about being cared for by a male nurse (Sis, Türkan, Meryem, & ÇelebiArzu, 2012). It is stated that female patients feel ashamed and anxious when receiving patient care from a male nurse; however, as the level of education and income increases, the request to receive care from an opposite-sex also increases (Armut; 2018). In a study conducted to examine patients' and their relatives' opinions of male nurses, %70.9 of the participants reported that quality of practice and care provided by a nurse was more important than the nurse's gender (Alan & Uğur, 2018).

It is important to be aware of opinions and attitudes among different segments of society about male nurses. Besides, it is considered that determining the experiences of male nurses in work life, and examining the phenomenon of being a male nurse will contribute to our understanding of the relationship between gender and nursing. Further studies on the subject in different cultures may reveal the impact of culture on the relationship between nursing and gender.

### **AIM AND OBJECTIVE**

This study aims to explore the reasons for men to choose nursing as a profession in Turkey and their experiences in the profession from their perspectives.

### **METHODS DESIGN**

This is a qualitative descriptive study. we searched answers to the following questions;

1. What were the influencing factors on career choice of male nurses?
2. What is it like to be a male nurse in health care services in Turkey?
3. What differences exist in patients' attitudes towards male and female nurses?

### **SAMPLE**

The study population consisted of male nurses working in a private and a public hospital in Ankara. We used purposive sampling method for this purpose.

And the study sample consisted of 11 male nurses who agreed to participate in the study and had at least one year of work experience.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The data were collected between January and February 2020. In order to obtain the study data, we prepared semistructured in-depth interview questions based on literature. The data collection tool included questions about sociodemographic information, reasons for choosing nursing career, experiences lived at workplace, interactions with patients, colleagues, and other health care professionals.

Interview questions were as follows:

1. Can you tell me your reasons for choosing nursing career?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences with patients, your colleagues and other health care professionals?
3. Can you tell me about your experiences while practicing nursing interventions?

One of the researchers interviewed the volunteer nurses. The interviews were conducted at the place and time that the participants approved, and they were audio recorded. At the end of each interview, the researcher recorded the answers of the participants. Audio records were transcribed on the computer.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The study data were evaluated using inductive thematic analysis. We tried to elicit the meaning units in each statement of the participants, assigned codes to these units, grouped the codes according to the similarity in the units, reevaluated similarities and differences, and finally created themes. Results were determined and interpreted using the organized codes and themes.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Ethical approval was obtained from Non-invasive Research Ethics Committee of Lokman Hekim University (issue no:2020/33, code no:2020031). Written permissions were obtained from the management of the hospitals where the study was carried out. Nurses were informed about the purpose of the study, and those who gave voluntary informed consent were included in the study.

### **RESULTS**

Sociodemographic data; of the male nurses, four were working in the public hospital and the others were working in the private hospital. Six were between the ages of 20 and 30 years, and the others were over 30 years old. Five had 1 to 10 years of work experience,

and the rest had 10 to 20 years of work experience. The numbers of nurses by departments were as follows; 2 were working at emergency department, 1 at intensive care unit, 4 at medical unit, 2 at surgical unit, and 2 were nurse managers.

The male nurses' experiences and reason for choosing nursing were examined and represented in codes, sub-themes and themes in Table 1.

affection increased work commitment among the participants.

(Participant (P) 2) I was living in a village and didn't have many choices. I wanted to have a job quickly. This is why I chose nursing.

(P 3) Let me put it this way, in the first year of my education, my only reason for choosing this profession

CODE	SUB-THEME	THEME
It is a profession to earn money quickly I chose it to find a job in an easy way My family had financial struggles, I wanted to help them The only reason I chose this profession was related with financial issues	Job security	Economic reasons
I have experienced reactions from most of patients like "I couldn't get used to male nurses" Patients' demands are mostly about gender Patients treat male nurses with more respect and more care, but they treat female nurses like they were their daughters, make free with them. So they prefer female nurses for intimate care There are people asking for a female nurse even for injection	Gendered attitude among patients	Refusal of nursing care
I think male nurses are treated in a more rude way I get angrier at male nurses I enjoy working with male nurses, to be frank, because they don't take maternity leave or use breastfeeding break, which causes lack of qualified staff Male nurses are not allowed to work in obstetric units	Unjust attitude towards male nurses	Gender discrimination
We, as male nurses, work in intensive care units, emergency department and operating rooms When a heavy patient requires to be mobilized or pulled up or moved in bed, male nurse is asked to do it We generally do the hard works Male nurses are assigned to transfer patients with violent tendencies I assign male and single nurses more night shifts	Inequalities in the allocation of tasks	Inequality
When I am giving an IM injection to a female patient, I touch patient to find the correct area, but patient may misunderstand it... Sometimes I feel nervous while performing a nursing activity I got reactions from patients like "... it is better if a female nurse do it" Female nurses are preferred to perform specific care interventions	Challenges during performing nursing activities	Occupational stress

**Table 1: Codes, Sub-Themes and Themes**

## JOB SECURITY

When examining male nurses' reasons for choosing nursing profession, we found that the most common reason was job security. Although job security was the reason for choosing nursing, we argue that job satisfaction derived from helping people with

was financial issues because my score in university exam wasn't very high and I chose nursing which will give me the opportunity to get a job and earn money quickly. Then, after one year of education, conscience issues and feelings were involved and I stayed in the profession.

(P 11) My thoughts about it are just like that I chose nursing as it was a job that I could get into a career, earn money, and find a job, with the guidance of my teachers. Then, I've realized that this job is right for me, we touch people's lives and do a good job. I mean it is a profession that I get a result, and so I've loved it, owned it, and progressed in it.

(P 1) My family had financial struggles, I wanted to help them. I attended to medical vocational high school to get a job easily.

### **REFUSAL OF NURSING CARE**

Male nurses are not preferred by female patients due to social norms, which decreases work productivity and also may deteriorate teamwork by increasing female nurses' workload. Besides, male nurses reported that they felt anxiety during nursing activities because they thought that they wouldn't be able to defend themselves against false accusations of improper behavior.

(P 6) I work at the emergency department, people ask for female nurses even for injection. They want female nurses to give it. And then I drop everything and look for a female nurse, it is a waste of time. (refusal of nursing care/unproductive work)

(P 1) Patients' demands are mostly about gender. Especially for specific nursing interventions, female patients ask for female nurses. And when it happens, I ask support from my co-workers. Female patients don't let me perform some specific care interventions.

(P 5) Patients treat male nurses with more respect and more care, but they treat female nurses like they were their daughters, make free with them. They already think that nurses are females, you know, when they see a male nurse, they show respect to him as they mistake him for a doctor.

### **GENDERED ATTITUDE**

It can be argued that the acceptance of male nurses by society is still difficult today. Also, social pressure and peer bullying that male nurses experience make it difficult for them to accept themselves in their profession and they even have a hard time telling people their job.

(P 4) I, as a nurse manager, enjoy working with male nurses, to be frank, because they don't take maternity leave or use breastfeeding break, which causes a lack of qualified staff. At the end of the day, I am responsible for the number of employees per department.

(P 9) For example, there is a problem in a department, which concerns everyone, but I get angrier at the male nurse, use more offensive words to him, but I use polite sentences when I am warning a female nurse.

(P 11) I think that we, male nurses, are treated in a more rude way compared to female nurses. People use forms like sweetie/honey while talking to a female nurse, they are more polite. When talking to a male nurse, they are ruder, like they say "shut up" or "go away". (gendered attitude)

(P 5) Male nurses are preferred in intensive care and emergency departments, so to say, these units are stressful and female nurses are emotional and they cannot take the pressure, also patients here are confined to bed, they require to be pulled up or moved and we can carry them, this is another reason why they employ us there. But we are not allowed to work in obstetric units.

### **INEQUALITY**

Male nurses experience discriminatory behaviors from their colleagues in task allocations at workplace. It may be concluded that nurse managers enjoy working with male nurses. On the other hand, male nurses prefer them more for strength-related tasks than for care related ones. Moreover, male nurses' emotional needs are generally ignored, although they are employed at more stressful and intensive departments, and they are more likely to be exposed to rude behaviors than female nurses.

(P 4) In my unit, I act like this, I protect female nurses more, for instance, when moving a heavy patient, like pulling a patient up or standing up, females are weak, male nurses move the patient, of course. Men are physically stronger and they have more muscle mass than women, so I assign strength needed tasks to male nurses, I hold them on the front for these tasks.

(P 9) For example, I have nurses married and single, I prefer male nurses for night and weekend shifts. Women are mothers, they have children going to school. But when a male nurse is in the same situation, you know, male nurses also have children, I assign shifts uniquely to male and female nurses if a male nurse works a weekend shift, the female nurse works the other weekend shift. But if a female nurse is married and has a child and male nurse is new and single, then I assign him more night shifts.

(P 3) I think there is an inequality in task allocation, generally, we, as male nurses, work in emergency or operating rooms. Or we are asked to help to mobilize a patient, even if we are at break time. (unjust attitude)

(P 10) We generally do the hard works, we transferred patients to litter, and we took patients to operating room due to the shortage of porters, they even said that male nurses would go together with every porter, so we went up and down with every litter with or without a patient on it. I mean we used to perform every task, for example, let's say somebody has to take patient to the



x-ray department and there is no porter around, then they say “well, why won't you take the patient, you can carry the litter.” or, you know, when serum bottles and packages came to the ward, we used to carry and place them, as females couldn't remove them, I'm not complaining, I'm just telling what we do.

### **OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

Male nurses experience worries about their career due to fear of false abuse allegations during nursing activities, and sometimes, they meet with patients' refusal of nursing care provided by them. It is considered that because of the negative experiences male nurses live, they cannot fully perform requirements of nursing, and this situation reduces job performance and commitment to work among male nurses.

(P 2) When I am giving an IM injection to a female patient, I touch the patient to find the correct area, but the patient may misunderstand it and I may be accused of abusing her... such things happen, it makes you feel uneasy and nervous.

(P 4) For example, I got reactions from female patients like “Don't get me wrong, but this is not something you can do, it is better if a female nurse does it”, I've encountered such things and I know my friends also experience similar things, I've mostly witnessed what patients say to my male colleagues.

(P 3) I want to tell something I lived, we were attending clinic visits with doctors, during the visit of patients who had mastectomy surgery, patients used to say that, you know, “could male nurses leave the room?”. Although all doctors were male, we used to leave the patient room, and doctors used to continue the visit themselves...(gender inequality)

### **DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to determine and explain the experience of being a male nurse in health care services in Turkey from the viewpoints of male nurses. We found that job security was the most common reason for choosing nursing career among male nurses. Among other common reasons were the desire to get a job easily, a regular salary and a job guarantee. A study conducted in Israel (Ashkenazi, Livshiz-Riven, Romem, & Grinstein-Cohen, 2017) demonstrated that male nurses were more likely to have financial reasons for choosing nursing career than females. It also argued that the public's perception that nursing was a low-status female profession prevented male students from choosing nursing as a career. Social stereotypes in Turkey indicate that nursing profession is more appropriate to women. From this point of view, it may be argued that even today, acceptance of the phenomenon of a male nurse in Turkish society is a

difficult issue. Social pressure and peer bullying male nurses experience make it hard for them to accept themselves and even to tell their jobs to people.

Examining patients' views, we may conclude that female patients don't want to be cared for by a male nurse because of gender perception, privacy, spiritual and/or religious beliefs. In the interviews we conducted, male nurses reported that female patients used phrases meaning that they didn't want to be cared for by male nurses. A study (Cangöl & Cangöl, 2016) indicated that female patients hospitalized in obstetrics and gynecology units had a positive perception towards men entering nursing; however, they had negative perception towards receiving care from male nurses. Similarly, another study (Taşçı, 2007) revealed that female patients in obstetrics and gynecology units perceived nursing as a female profession, and they would be uncomfortable if they received care from a male nurse, and they thought that male nurses should work at clinics in which male patients were hospitalized. One of the reasons why female patients refuse to be cared for by a male nurse may be fear of sexual harassment. In a study (MacWilliams, Schmidt, & Bleich, 2013), it was shown that among the challenges male nurses encounter were communication differences between men and women and female patients' attitudes of fear and suspicion towards their touch.

Men's views on male nurses are sexist, and this sexist view has resulted in the cliché that a man choosing a female job must be a gay. All of these prejudices have caused paradoxes involving misinterpretations of male nurses' touch when they are providing care, and disapproval of male caregivers, and refusal of health care provided by a male nurse, and a general suspicion towards male nurses. Besides, a false accusation made against a male nurse is an example of a stigma. All of these make male nurses feel vulnerable. They feel uncomfortable when they have to touch patients. Therefore, such attitudes adversely affect their ability to deliver nursing care (Evans, 2004). According to a study carried out with 644 patients (Uysal, Karakoç, & Kiyak, 2019), male patients preferred male nurses, and female patients preferred female nurses to care for them. In another study conducted with patients in obstetrics and gynecology clinics (Sis et al., 2012) female patients reported that they would be uncomfortable receiving care from a male nurse. In addition, researchers stated that most of women had negative attitudes towards male nurses and preferred female nurses to care for them.

In perceptions and attitudes of health care professionals, we detected that female nurse put in a

good word for their male colleagues; however, male nurses were assigned with a more heavy workload, they were treated more rudely by other health care professionals, and they were refused by female patients, on the other hand, patients treated them with more respect and sometimes patients mistook them for doctors. A study carried out with male nurses in Uganda by Achora (2016) stated that patients treated male nurses as they were doctors, and thus, some health care professionals accused male nurses of fraud. Male nurses are employed at departments intensive care, emergency, surgery, and operating rooms as they are considered physically stronger, yet their emotional needs are ignored and they are exposed to psychological violence. Even though the male nurses who participated in our study didn't complain about the workload, they reported that they were given more work than female nurses in the allocation of tasks, and their tasks were more difficult, and they experienced inequalities in the allocation of tasks. On the other hand, providing patient care and helping people with feelings of affection and compassion may increase job satisfaction among male nurses and be among the factors affecting their commitment to work.

In our study, nurse managers reported that they enjoyed working with male nurses as they didn't use maternity leave or breastfeeding break. In compliance with our result, in a study carried out with 467 participants about health care managers' opinions of male nurses, nurses reported that managers preferred male nurses with the thought that it was more beneficial to work with them who didn't use special leaves like maternity (Saraç & Özyurda, 2020). All things considered, in order to benefit from the advantages of being a nurse, which are the reasons for men to choose nursing as a career, nurse managers should guide, support and encourage male nurses to perform nursing activities and consequently reduce the anxiety level they experience during these activities.

### **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

The present study has limitations. The participants were from two hospitals located in Ankara, experiences of other nurses in Turkey might be different. Since the qualitative data we obtained reflect viewpoints of the participants, the results of the study cannot be generalized.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Male nurses are more likely to encounter negative attitudes and perceptions than females. It is stated that male nurses are exposed to gender discrimination in the workplace. Further research that will be carried out on the subject may raise awareness for male nurses among all health care professionals. Additionally, fair

work, fair workload, and rewarding systems can help improve feeling of belonging and job motivation among male nurses.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest

### **ETHIC APPROVAL**

The study was approved by the Non-Invasive Research Ethics Committee of Lokman Hekim

University (issue no:2020/33, code no:2020031). Participating nurses were informed about

the study, and written informed consent was obtained.

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

### **AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT**

As the authors of this paper, we have declared that they all have made a substantial

contribution to the information or material submitted for the publication and we have

approved the final version of this manuscript.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS**

Both authors contributed equally to the conceptualisation, writing, editing and review of this work.

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