

Social gender and nursing in Turkey: A qualitative research

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Abstract

Although the Turkish women have a much better position in terms of jobs and education, they still assume the roles expected by the society, despite all the changes that have taken place in today's Turkey, which continues to have a patriarchal society structure. Working did not change women's roles of homemaking and motherhood in the family; instead, their burden in social life has increased. Nursing in Turkey has been regarded as a women's profession for many years and has only been performed by women until the last decade. In this regard, this study discusses the roles of women within the context of social gender in Turkish society, being a working woman, how nurses position themselves within the community and health care team and how they see themselves through this fact. In this qualitative study, in-depth interview technique was used. Data were collected and interpreted by interviewing nurses of various age, education level and professional experience.

Keywords: Gender, Social gender, Woman, Nursing, Image.

Introduction

In every period of history, women have undertaken responsibilities inside and outside the house at least as much as men, even beyond them, and have contributed to the economic life. However, social gender approaches impose restrictions on women's work outside the home. In the Turkish society, which has a dominant belief that women should be at home and their main duty is the responsibilities related to the family and the house, women are often affected by the conflict when they want to work both at home and outside. At the same time, the social bias also legitimizes the concentration of women in certain occupations.

In most of the developed and industrialized countries, nursing is considered largely women's profession, dominated by women.¹ In the 19th century, Florence Nightingale introduced the idea of being a "good nurse" requires being "a good woman".² When we look at the

historical process, it seems that nursing is based on the protective and caring behaviour of women, which results from maternal compassion. It shows the relationship between the concepts of social gender, occupation and caring, which is traditionally perceived a women's work.^{3,4} Although there has been a significant change in the nature of care-related occupations in the last century, nursing continues to be seen as a female profession.⁵

With the regulations made in the Nursing Law in 2007, the gender discrimination in the nursing was eliminated and men became legally a member of the nursing profession. Thus, Turkish society started to see men as nurses.³

This study was undertaken to determine female nurses' struggle for a balance between their roles and responsibilities at home and work life, their perception on the profession's place in the community, and their views about male nurses in the profession within the context of social gender in Turkey. The research is based on in-depth interview method.

Method

The study group consisted of 20 nurses working in the clinical and nonclinical units of the Elazig Mental Health and Diseases Hospital, a regional hospital in the province of Elazig, located in the Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. The interviews with nurses in the study group was completed when the responses from the nurses began to be similar, i.e. when the study reached a qualitative saturation.

Data were collected using unstructured interview proforma with open-ended questions. The data were collected between January 9th and 31st, 2017 and the study was carried out on a voluntary basis. Participants were informed about the use of a recorder in the interviews, and participants who did not give permission for the audio recording were not included in the research.

Content analysis was performed in this study, which is based on qualitative research design approach. The data were analyzed in four stages: coding of the data, determination of the themes in the encoded data, organization of codes and themes, identification and interpretation of results.

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The research data were collected after obtaining permission from Firat University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee regarding the ethical suitability of the research.

Results

The average age of the nurses participating in the study was 38.1 ± 6.7 years (minimum 28-maximum 50), years in the profession was 17.2 ± 8.9 years (minimum 4-maximum 32) and their years of marriage was 13.2 ± 7.9 years (minimum 2-maximum 28). Of the nurses, 11(55%) were university graduates, 6(30%) had associate degree, 2(10%) had Bachelor's degree and 1(5%) was health high-school graduate.

Theme 1: Changed/Unchanged Women's Roles.

When asked what the classical duties expected from women by the community, all the nurses emphasized that women's duties were "to provide housekeeping and order, to make food, to give birth and to up bring, to serve the family members and not to disregard them."

Nurse Z.A's statements cover the responses given (Bachelor's degree, 35): "The society wants women to undertake everything, be the housewife and head of household at the same time, considering women's contribution to economy recently. I think women are overwhelmed with the burden of excessive responsibility."

In the study by Okten⁶, the majority of the household heads defined the women's function as maternity (giving birth and upbringing) and doing the housework and looking after her husband.

Theme 2: The Place of Nursing Profession in Domestic Life

Another question put to the nurses was how -positive or negative- the nursing profession affects their experiences at home. Participants responded to this question with "mental and physical fatigue, intolerance to spouse and children at home, and not being able to catch up with housework due to spending most of the time at work."

The other answers given by the participants included: inability to take adequate care of children, inability to allocate time for themselves, and insufficient financial contribution of the profession.

In Karahan and Bener's study,⁷ which has similarities to our research findings, it has been reported that almost all the nurses experienced problems such as not being able to take enough care of children, being tired and nervous,

reflecting the problems to the family, lacking support from their husbands and neglecting household chores due to their work life.⁷

Theme 3: Marriage and Having Children: Their Places in Professional Career

The general opinion regarding the fundamental role of women as mothers, spouses and housewives in Turkey also determines the boundaries of women's participation in the workforce, their professional success and career only plays a secondary role.^{8,9} Half of the participants indicated that being married and having children affected their career plans negatively. What the nurse B.D. says is important in terms of revealing the current situation (Bachelor's degree, 47): "Before I got married, I was planning to enroll in a second college. However, after the marriage and having children, it's all over. 'What's the point of having another degree!' said my husband." It has also been found in other studies that the responsibilities of women related to children and housework are the biggest obstacles in terms of their career.¹⁰⁻¹²

Theme 4: Social Value of the Nursing Profession: Burden / Alienation / Worthlessness

Participants were asked to evaluate the community's opinion towards the nursing profession, and more than half of the participants responded that nursing has less reputation in the community compared to many other professions, emphasizing that nursing is not at the place it deserves.

Some of the participants emphasized that the fact that nursing education is at the university level changed the perspective of the society positively. Nurse B.D. said this in this regard (Bachelor's degree, 47): "Being a college graduate, and increased number of studies on the professional had a positive impact. I believe it will be better."

Theme 5: Departure from the Women's Profession: A New Perception

Participants were asked about their opinions on men's engagement in nursing profession in Turkey. Although there were criticisms at some points, the majority of the participants stated positive opinions about the men working in nursing. Especially, they pointed out that male patients communicate better with male nurses, they contribute to the elimination of gender discrimination in the profession, and that as a profession, both genders complement each other, in cases such as requiring strength, and are good at eliminating the negative image of the society and protecting their rights.

On the other hand, there were participant opinions which were completely against the engagement of men in the nursing profession. On this, Nurse M.K. expressed her opinion (Bachelor's degree, 40): "I don't lean towards this. I believe women show empathy opinions better, understand pain better due to their motherhood. I think nursing should be a women's profession."

Conclusion

Considering the context of social gender, responsibilities and the roles expected from women by the Turkish society, which has a patriarchal structure, women's struggle to establish a balance between traditional household roles and profession continue to exist. The fundamental findings of this study also indicate the invariance in these roles of women. Being a working woman brings problems such as physical and mental fatigue, intolerance to children and inability to keep up with household chores, despite its advantages such as economic freedom and conscious care of children. Another important finding is that marriage and having children affected their career plans. Nurses think that the nursing profession is underrated in the community, and has a lesser reputation compared to other professions. Participants have mostly positive opinions about the male nurses, which is a sign of departure from the women-only profession.

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