

Undergraduate nursing student's perception toward the nursing profession in Iraqi-Kurdistan. An exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

Nursing students' perception towards the nursing profession is vital and has a positive impact on the successful recruitment, retention, and attrition of staff from the health care agencies. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of undergraduate nursing students toward the nursing profession in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan region. The study was conducted at the University of Duhok, a college of nursing in the Kurdistan Region. The researcher of the current study used Nursing Image as a Profession Questionnaire (NIPQ) for the purpose of data collection. Based on the analysis of the participant's responses, the results revealed that in general students have positive perceptions towards the nursing profession. The early twentieth age group students were more satisfied in nursing than the late twentieth age group. High school grades were regarded as the main reason for joining the faculty of nursing. Having a nurse friend or relative and a positive family reaction was perceived as positive influential factors for student enrollment in the nursing program. Few students had a very negative attitude and they attacked the nursing profession when talking with others. The current study concluded that students have positive perceptions towards the nursing profession in the four aspects of the description of the profession, social view perspectives, benefits of the nursing profession, and students' satisfaction in nursing.

1. Introduction

Undergraduate nursing students' perception towards the nursing profession has an important and positive impact on their performance, retention, self-concept, self-esteem, and recruitment. Therefore, nurses who have positive impressions of nursing professionals will have stronger and more positive relationships with their patients, peers, and the community as a whole [1]. According to the literature, students' preconceptions of nursing have a profound influence on their decision whether to continue with their nursing program or to leave nursing [2]. Indeed, nurses suffer from a lot of pressure, this could be due to their working environment, dealing with symptoms related to patients' illnesses and conditions. Nurses also experience low job satisfaction [3]. Although nursing is a valuable profession and plays an essential role in taking care of patients and maintaining people's health, however, to some extent, nurses are not well recognized by society to the degree they deserve especially in developing countries. Therefore, this has a negative impact on the value of the nursing profession, the level of love felt for the nursing profession, and the desire to study nursing among nursing students [3]. Earlier research shows that decreased enrollment in nursing studies is a global issue, with significant numbers of nursing students leaving before completing the degree. Some possible solutions to decrease attrition in nursing programs include effective teaching methods and styles; stress management of students; faculty support; and perceptions of nursing [4]. A number of studies undertaken in the Middle East have demonstrated that factors such as students' perceptions, attitudes, and levels of dissatisfaction with the nursing profession lead to attrition of students to study nursing. Moreover, working with the opposite gender and disrespecting people in the nursing profession are also factors that prevent the students from becoming a nurse [5]. Consequently, identifying student perception is a significant factor in recruiting students to study nursing as well as in the retention of nurses in different healthcare settings [6]. In Iraq, until now the female nurse is called a sister, and a male nurse is called 'almudamad' which means dresser or bandage dresser. This appellation was first used before the mid-twentieth century when there was just a high school of nursing and midwives graduated from secondary school. Moreover, till now regardless of nurses' academic achievement, there is a large gap between the salaries and incentives of nurses and physicians. Salaries are paid according to acquired certificates, not the working hours as in some developed countries. For instance, in Iraq physicians study medicine for six years, their salaries are more than college nurses who study for four years despite nurses working

longer hours than physicians. Furthermore, although nurses and physicians work together in the same environment, hazardous allowances received by the nurses are half of the physicians, in spite of the fact that nurses work longer hours and contact more with patients than physicians. Similarly, in Turkey which is a neighboring country to Iraq, the word 'nurse' in Turkish, 'hemsire' means sister, and the majority of nursing students had a negative perception of the nursing profession due to stereotypical ideas and considering nursing as a female-dominated profession [7, 8]. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the ratio of student enrollment to nursing in Iraq is high and based on competition. In other words, only students with high grades are eligible to study nursing. This perhaps is due to the availability of career opportunities offered by the government and private sector. Although a number of studies on students' perceptions toward the nursing profession and factors influencing it were reported in the literature, however, no studies have been found in Iraq. Therefore it is important to conduct this study, particularly in the Kurdistan region to identify the student's perception towards nursing in this region and to know the reasons for enrollment of nursing students in the nursing programs. According to the literature, this will have a substantial effect on the recruitment, retention, and attrition of students in nursing studies. It is expected that the results of the current study will provide some facts regarding students' perceptions of nursing careers for nursing educators in order to increase the awareness of the value of the nursing profession for students [9]. Moreover, the findings could create a more interesting and motivating learning process that might have a positive influence on the quality of students after graduation and on the retention and decreasing attrition of nurses in different healthcare settings [6].

2. Material and Methods

In the current exploratory descriptive study, a convenient sample of undergraduate nursing students from four nursing classes at the University of Duhok/ college of nursing consented and voluntarily participated in the study. A total of 276 male and female students participated.

Data Collection Tools

Official permission to conduct the current study was obtained from the scientific committee of the college of nursing, Duhok University. The researcher of the current study used the NIPQ questionnaire for the purpose of data collection. This questionnaire has been used in Middle East countries that was developed by Al Jarrah [10]. This questionnaire was adopted by the researcher after reviewing the relevant and current literature to conduct this study in the Kurdistan region. The validity of the study tool has been tested by the author of the questionnaire through a pilot study. The reliability of the questionnaire was statistically tested by using the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test and its values ranged from 0.64 to 0.72. [1]. It is a self-reporting questionnaire comprised of two sections: The first section is concerned with the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students including age, gender, academic year, reasons for enrollment in the college of nursing, and the family's reaction to student's enrollment. The second section was designed to assess nursing students' perceptions toward the nursing profession. It is a Likert scale format answered on a 5-point scale of response (agree, disagree, not sure, strongly agree, and strongly disagree). This tool included 27 statements related to the: perceptions of students concerning the nursing profession (Seven questions); society's views towards the nursing profession (Five questions); students' perceptions towards benefits of the nursing profession (Seven questions); students' satisfaction towards the nursing profession (Six questions); and feelings and images of nursing students towards the nursing profession (Two questions). The questionnaires were delivered by the researcher to students in the classrooms before starting the lecture and getting tired. Although the mother tongue of the nursing students was Kurdish, however, the nursing program in the college was in English and the researcher clarified some questions based on the students' requests that needed to be clarified. Students filled out the study tool which took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Then the completed questionnaires were collected immediately by the researcher.

Ethical considerations

All the participants were informed about the aims, the benefits of the study as well as the data

collection process. A verbal consent was obtained from them. It was clearly stated that students' participation is voluntary and confidential by requesting them to avoid putting their names on the questionnaire. They were also assured of the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences for their academic achievement.

Statistical analysis

Data were coded and exported for the purpose of calculation. The statistical calculations were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (25:00 IBM). The general information of the nursing students was presented in mean and standard deviation or number and percentage. The student's views about the nursing profession were determined in number and percentage. The scores of categories of nursing views were determined in mean and standard deviation. The comparisons of scores of nursing students' tensions in different characteristics were examined in an independent t-test or ANOVA one-way. The post hoc comparisons were determined in a Tukey test. The predictors of students' views and society's views on the nursing profession were examined in standard least squares with an effect of leverage. The significant level of difference was determined by a p -value <0.05 . The statistical analyses were performed in JMP Pro 14.3.0.

3. Results and Discussion

General Characteristics of the Subjects

Demographic characteristics of the 276 nursing students are displayed in Table 1. The majority of the participants were female (66.30%) and were in their early twenties (60.87%). More than one third (45.29%) of the students did join the college of nursing due to their grade in high school followed by only 30.07 % of the desire to help others. The majority of the study subjects (73.91%) had a family member or a friend in the nursing profession. Concerning family reaction regarding enrollment of students in a nursing college, nearly half of students (49.28%) reported that their family reaction was positive.

Table 1: General characteristics of nursing students

General characteristics (n=276)	Statistics	
	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	93	33.70
Female	183	66.30
Age (year)	20.77	1.30
17-20	103	37.32
21-30	168	60.87
31 and older	5	1.81

Stage of Students		
First stage	77	27.90
2nd stage	68	24.64
3rd stage	66	23.91
4th stage	65	23.55
Reasons for enrollment at college of nursing		
High school grade	125	45.29
Desire to help others	83	30.07
Challenging/rewarding	5	1.81
Financial reasons/ Variety of career opportunities	45	16.30
Advice from relatives/friends	18	6.52
Do you have a nurse friend or relative?		
Yes	204	73.91
No	72	26.09
Family reaction		
Positive	136	49.28
Negative	54	19.57
Neutral	86	31.16

Table (2) reveals the perception of students toward the nursing profession. This perception has been examined through four aspects including the description of the profession, social perspectives, benefits of the nursing profession, and students' satisfaction in nursing. In regard to the first aspect, it can be clearly seen that students had positive perceptions toward the description of the profession in all items with the means' total score of 2.49 and the standard deviation of 0.33. Item No. 5 (nursing is a humanitarian profession) occupied the high percentage (67.39 %) of strongly agree and ranked first. Moreover, a high percentage of the respondents (40.94%) disagreed and strongly disagreed (18.48%) that nursing is just a job rather than a profession. The majority of the students responded between disagreed (32.97%) and strongly disagreed (29.35 %) that nursing is a feminine profession. Concerning the aspect of social views, in general, students responded positive perception for all societal view items with a total mean score of 2.35 and the standard deviation of 0.47. The highest percentage (50%) of participants that responded strongly agreed and agreed (34.06 %) was observed in item No 12 (the nursing profession is important as medicine in our society). In accordance with the results of Table 2, it is apparent that students pointed toward positive perceptions in relation to the benefits of the nursing profession in all items, the means' total score was 2.23, and the standard deviation of 0.35. Item No. 15 (nursing helping in the promotion of health and prevention of diseases) occupied the highest percentage (59.06%) of strongly agreed and ranked first with none of the participants (0%) stating strongly disagreed. Regarding the last aspect of the nursing profession which is the view of students' satisfaction in nursing, based on the analysis of the participant's responses they had a positive perception in all items with the means' total score of 3.12 and the standard deviation of 0.51 except in item No 24. The most apparent answers were observed in item No 1 (nursing is a prestigious profession) in which 49.64% of the students agreed with this statement. However, as mentioned earlier, students have a negative view on the topic of item No 24 (I would like my child to become a nurse) in which 19.57% disagreed and 34.06% strongly disagreed with this question.

Table 2: Perceptions of students toward the nursing profession

Description of the profession (n=276)	Rating no (%)				
	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
1. A respectful profession	119 (43.12)	18 (6.52)	31 (11.23)	102 (36.96)	6 (2.17)
2. Job and not a profession	40 (14.49)	113 (40.94)	62 (22.46)	10 (3.62)	51 (18.48)
3. A feminine profession	37 (13.41)	91 (32.97)	49 (17.75)	18 (6.52)	81 (29.35)
4. Similar to that of the servants' job	55 (19.93)	55 (19.93)	46 (16.67)	20 (7.25)	100 (36.23)
5. A humanitarian profession	71 (25.72)	5 (1.81)	12 (4.35)	186 (67.39)	2 (0.72)

6. The nursing is an ethical and healthcare profession	104 (37.68)	0 (0.00)	14 (5.07)	156 (56.52)	2 (0.72)
7. The healthcare service provided by nurses is as important as that provided by physicians	98 (35.51)	4 (1.45)	21 (7.61)	143 (51.81)	10 (3.62)
Total score of students' perceptions	Mean: 2.49	SD: 0.33			
Society views (n=276)	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
8. Nurses are appreciated/respected by the society	94 (34.06)	42 (15.22)	78 (28.26)	28 (10.14)	34 (12.32)
9. Nurses work very hard	109 (39.49)	16 (5.80)	25 (9.06)	117 (42.39)	9 (3.26)
10. An essential profession in any society	116 (42.03)	11 (3.99)	29 (10.51)	115 (41.67)	5 (1.81)
11. Useless profession and can be ignored in the society	52 (18.84)	79 (28.62)	52 (18.84)	14 (5.07)	79 (28.62)
12. The nursing profession is important as medicine in our society	94 (34.06)	17 (6.16)	21 (7.61)	138 (50.00)	6 (2.17)
The total score of society views	Mean: 2.35	SD: 0.47			
Benefits (n=276)	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
13. An independent profession by which nurses make decisions for themselves	123 (44.57)	40 (14.49)	68 (24.64)	31 (11.23)	14 (5.07)
14. Important to patient's recovery	117 (42.39)	1 (0.36)	5 (1.81)	152 (55.07)	1 (0.36)
15. Helping in the promotion of health and prevention of diseases	102 (36.96)	2 (0.72)	9 (3.26)	163 (59.06)	0 (0.00)
16. Nurses feel good about what they do	116 (42.03)	11 (3.99)	46 (16.67)	101 (36.59)	2 (0.72)
17. Gives a chance to be self-autonomies at work	143 (51.81)	17 (6.16)	57 (20.65)	58 (21.01)	1 (0.36)
18. Nurses waste a lot of time being busy but doing nothing	22 (7.97)	97 (35.14)	42 (15.22)	3 (1.09)	112 (40.58)
19. Provides an opportunity for personality development	148 (53.62)	13 (4.71)	51 (18.48)	61 (22.10)	3 (1.09)
The total score of benefits	2.23	0.35			
Students' satisfaction (n=276)	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
20. A prestigious profession	137 (49.64)	21 (7.61)	41 (14.86)	71 (25.72)	6 (2.17)
21. A dangerous profession	130 (47.10)	45 (16.30)	54 (19.57)	31 (11.23)	16 (5.80)
22. Anyone could be a nurse easy	25 (9.06)	110 (39.86)	36 (13.04)	10 (3.62)	95 (34.42)
23. Equal to other professions	53 (19.20)	92 (33.33)	60 (21.74)	25 (9.06)	46 (16.67)
24. I would like my child to become a nurse	48 (17.39)	54 (19.57)	65 (23.55)	15 (5.43)	94 (34.06)
25. Nursing is an authoritarian profession	64 (23.19)	70 (25.36)	80 (28.99)	26 (9.42)	36 (13.04)
The total score of students' satisfaction	3.12	0.51			

Table (3) shows the feelings and images of nursing students about the nursing profession. The majority of the students (47.10 %) responded feeling proud. Unexpectedly, some students (6.16 %) attacked the nursing profession while talking with others about nursing.

Table 3: Feelings and images of nursing students towards the nursing profession

Students' views	Statistics	
	Count	Percentage
24. Feelings about the nursing profession when talking with others		
Attack nursing profession	17	6.16
Change topic (divert attention)	28	10.15
Defensive	80	28.99
Proud	130	47.10
Shy	21	7.61
25. Which of the following factors improve the image of nursing		
Clinical training	71	25.73
Effect of college members	36	13.04
Family members' opinion	28	10.15
Public view of nursing	24	8.70
Relationship with friends	31	11.23
Relationship with medical staff	33	11.96
Working conditions	53	19.20

Table 4 shows comparisons of the student's from socio-demographic aspects in society's views of the nursing profession. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the students (73.91%) had a nurse friend or relative with a P value =0.0155 which is statistically significant. In regard to society's views of students toward the nursing profession, there were statistically significant differences with a P value =0.0019 between the second stage and fourth stage of nursing college (P=0.0011) on the side of the second stage. There were also statistically significant differences between the third stage and fourth stage of nursing college (P=0.0437) on the side of the third stage. In other words, students of the second and third stages had a more positive perception toward the nursing profession from a society's perspective than students of the fourth stage.

Table 4: Comparisons of students and society's views on the nursing profession with socio-demographic aspects

Characteristics of students (n=276)	Students' perceptions			
	Mean	SD	P-value	Pairwise comparisons
Age				
17-20	2.54	0.34	0.1089	NA
21-30	2.44	0.38		
31 and older	2.54	0.31		
Stage of Students				
first stage	2.47	0.44	0.4864	NA
2nd stage	2.47	0.32		
3rd stage	2.47	0.35		
4th stage	2.55	0.28		
Reasons for enrollment				
High school grade	2.51	0.33	0.1334	NA
Desire to help others	2.45	0.34		
Challenging/rewarding	2.23	0.30		
Financial reasons	2.57	0.33		
Advice from relatives/friends	2.47	0.35		
friend or relative				
yes	2.51	0.32	0.0155	NA
No	2.39	0.45		
family reaction				
Positive	2.46	0.38	0.8963	NA
Negative	2.45	0.44		

Neutral	2.48	0.32		
Society view				
	Mean	SD	P-value	Pairwise comparisons
Age				
17-20	2.42	0.55	0.2579	
21-30	2.34	0.48		
31 and older	2.12	0.48		
Stage of Students				
first stage	2.31	0.39	0.0019	2nd stage vs. 4th stage (P=0.0011)
2nd stage	2.48	0.60		3rd stage vs. 4th stage (P=0.0437)
3rd stage	2.39	0.41		
4th stage	2.17	0.45		
Reasons for enrollment				
High school grade	2.41	0.55	0.2398	NA
Desire to help others	2.26	0.38		
Challenging/rewarding	2.44	0.33		
Financial reasons	2.37	0.47		
Advice from relatives/friends	2.44	0.28		
friend or relative				
yes	2.34	0.50	0.6662	NA
No	2.35	0.37		
family reaction				
Positive	2.30	0.46	0.1335	NA
Negative	2.45	0.53		
Neutral	2.35	0.43		

As illustrated in table 5 which demonstrates comparisons of nursing students' views about the benefits of the nursing profession, there were statistically significant differences with a P value= 0.0329 between first- and third-stage nursing students. Students of the first stage were more positive in the aspect of benefits of the nursing profession than in the third stage with a p value= 0.0340. Concerning reasons for enrollment of nursing students in the nursing studies, there were statistically significant differences between the reason of due to the high school grades versus the reason of desire to help others (P=0.0249) in favor of the last one. Moreover, there were highly significant differences (P <0.0001) in regard to the student's satisfaction with the nursing profession at different stages. Apparently, students of the third stage were less likely to be satisfied in the nursing profession than in other stages. There were also highly significant differences in relation to the comparison of reasons for enrollment of the nursing students with a P value <0.0001. Most of the students preferred financial reasons and high school grades to challenge/reward (P=0.0092*, P=0.0257*) respectively. Moreover, they preferred financial reasons over a desire to help others (P=0.0179*).


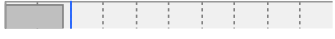

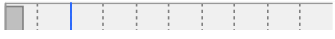

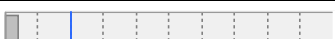
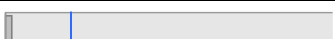
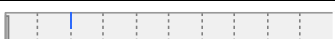
Table 5: Comparisons of nursing students' views about the benefits of satisfaction in the nursing profession

General characteristics (n=276)	Benefits perceptions			
	Mean	SD	P-value	Pairwise comparisons
Age				
17-20	2.21	0.34	0.7839	
21-30	2.24	0.35		
31 and older	2.17	0.27		
Stage of Students				
first stage	2.32	0.38	0.0329	first stage vs. 3rd stage (P= 0.0340)
2nd stage	2.20	0.37		
3rd stage	2.16	0.30		
4th stage	2.27	0.37		
Reasons for enrollment				
High school grade	2.28	0.37	0.0440	High school grade vs. Desire to help others (P= 0.0249)
Desire to help others	2.13	0.33		
Challenging/rewarding	2.23	0.26		
Financial reasons	2.23	0.30		
Advice from relatives/friends	2.31	0.39		
friend or relative				
yes	2.22	0.35	0.3375	
No	2.27	0.38		
family reaction				
Positive	2.21	0.36	0.1836	
Negative	2.31	0.40		
Neutral	2.23	0.31		
General characteristics (n=276)	Satisfaction			
	Mena	SD	P-value	Pairwise comparisons
Age				
17-20	3.21	0.51	0.0348	17-20 vs. 21-30 (P= 0.0261)
21-30	3.05	0.45		
31 and older	3.133	0.76		
Stage of Students				
first stage	3.26	0.46	<0.0001	first stage vs. 3rd stage (P< .0001*)
2nd stage	3.19	0.53		2nd stage vs. 3rd stage (P= 0.0004*)
3rd stage	2.85	0.45		4th stage vs. 3rd stage (P= 0.0017*)
4th stage	3.16	0.50		
Reasons for enrollment				
High school grade	3.15	0.51	0.0311	Financial reasons vs. Challenging/rewarding (P= 0.0092*)
Desire to help others	3.03	0.49		High school grade vs. Challenging/rewarding (P= 0.0257*)
Challenging/rewarding	2.63	0.43		Financial reasons vs. Desire to help others (P= 0.0179*)
Financial reasons	3.25	0.52		
Advice from relatives/friends	3.11	0.42		
friend or relative				
yes	3.11	0.51	0.8798	
No	3.16	0.51		
family reaction				
Positive	3.05	0.53	0.1197	
Negative	3.23	0.57		
Neutral	3.10	0.50		

Tables 6 and 7 show the main predictors related to students' perceptions of the nursing profession. As can be seen clearly that students pointed toward positive perceptions in relation to the benefits of the nursing profession. The researcher of the current study found that benefits of the nursing profession

were the main predictor of joining nursing students in the nursing programs and there were statistically significant differences with a P value =0.00300 between benefits and the other three aspects of the nursing profession that have been investigated including the description of the profession, social view perspectives, and students' satisfaction in nursing. Moreover, having a nurse friend or relative is another important predictor of joining nursing students in the faculty of nursing with a statistically significant difference and P value =0.01633 (Table 6 and Figure 1).

Table 6: Predictors of student's perceptions of the nursing profession

Predictors (n=276)	Outcome: students' perceptions	
	Presentations	P-value
Benefits		0.00300
Do you have a nurse friend or relative		0.01633
Age category		0.09192
Society views		0.26674
What was your family's reaction when you enrolled in nursing college		0.29642
Stage of Students		0.38654
Reasons for enrollment at the College of Nursing		0.58464
Satisfaction		0.74651

Standard least square was performed for statistical analysis

Prediction Profiler

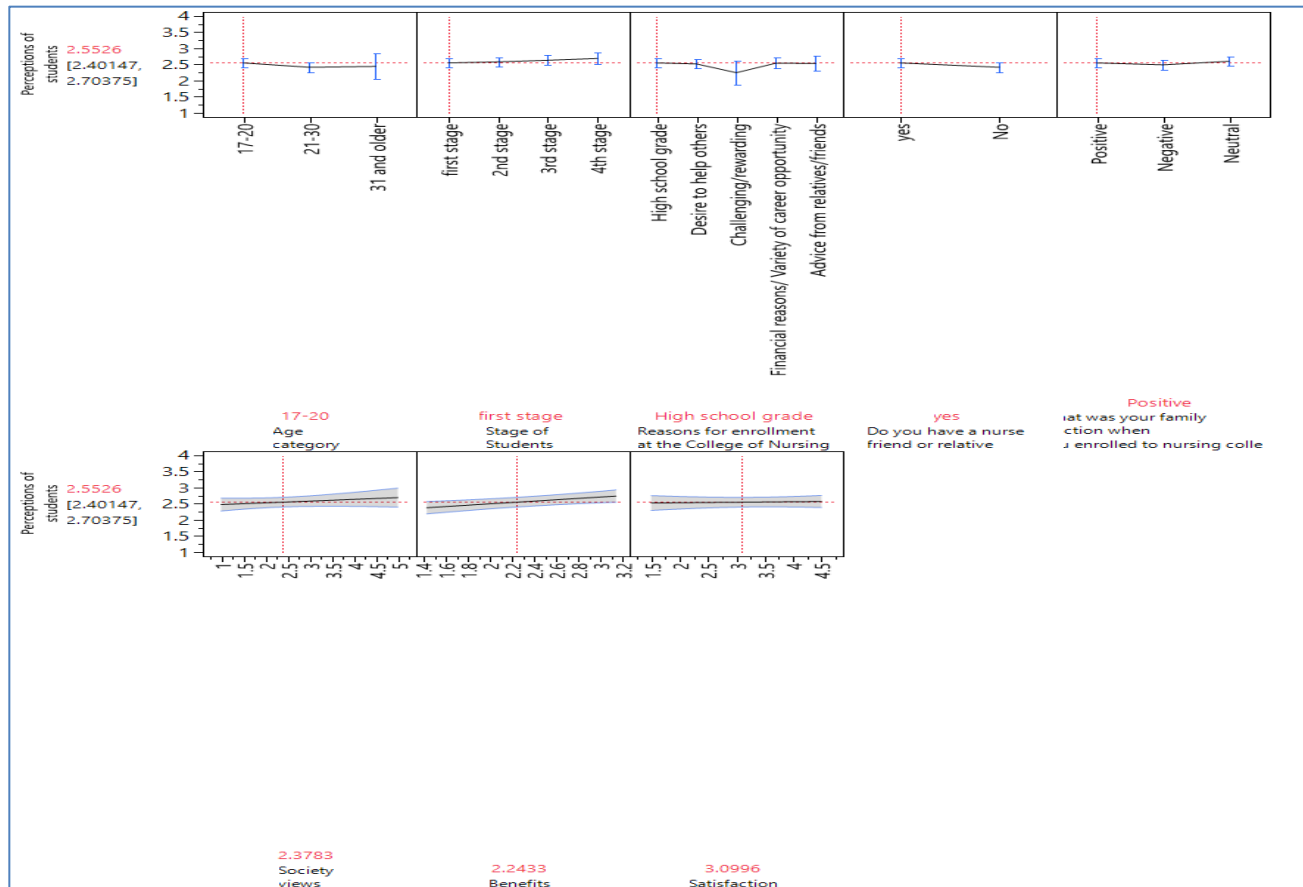
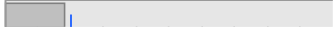
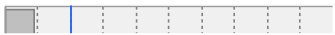





Fig 1: Profiler of Predictors of students' perceptions towards nursing profession

This study also explored that there were statistically significant differences among stages of students in relation to society's view with a P value =0.01536. Students of the second and third stages were more positive from a societal perspective than students of the fourth stage (Table 7 Figure 2).

Table 7: Predictors of society's view towards the nursing profession

Predictors (n=276)	Outcome: society's view	P-value
	Presentations	
Stage of Students		0.01536
What was your family's reaction when you enrolled to nursing college		0.12080
Reasons for enrollment at the College of Nursing		0.61487
Age category		0.95587
Do you have a nurse friend or relative		0.97162
Standard least square was performed for statistical analysis		

Prediction Profiler

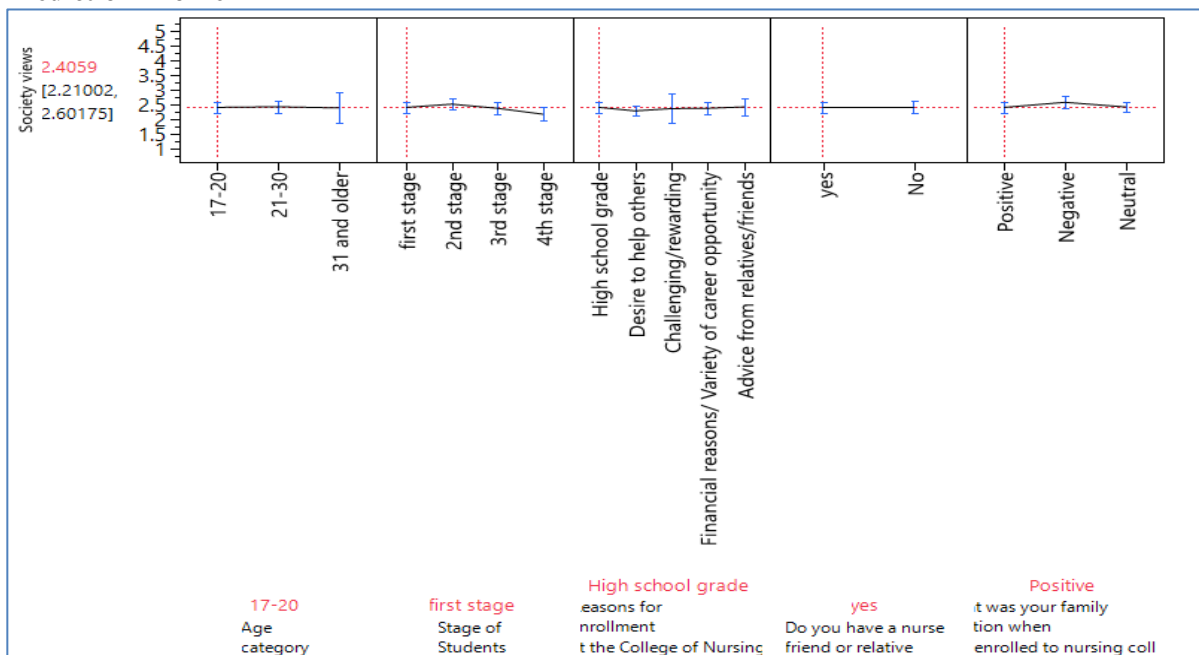


Fig 2: profiler of Predictors of society view towards nursing profession

Figure 3 illustrates correlations of nursing students' perceptions with society's views, benefits, and satisfaction toward the nursing profession. This study found that perceptions of nursing students toward the nursing profession were positively correlated with the benefits of the nursing profession ($r=0.1844$; $p\text{-value}=0.0021$). Other correlations were not statistically significant.

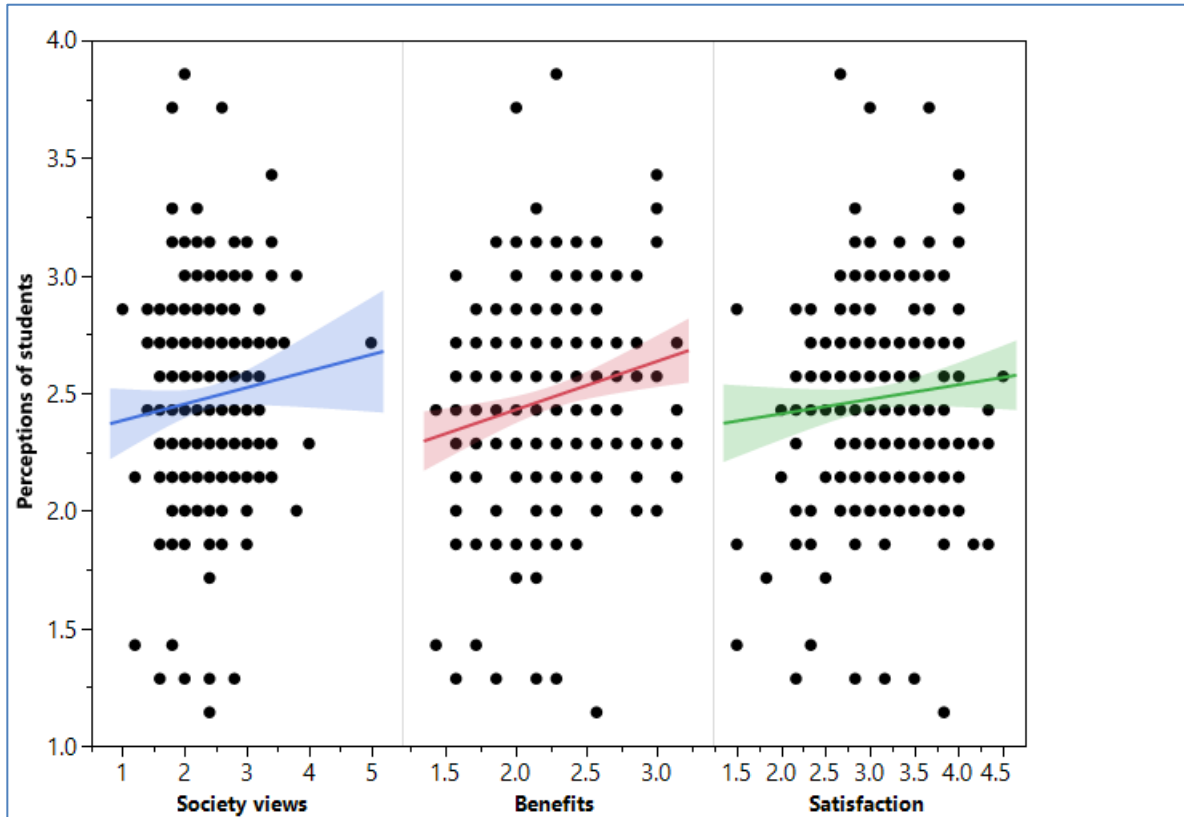


Fig 3: Correlations of nursing students' perceptions with society views, benefits and satisfaction toward nursing profession

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore undergraduate nursing students' perception towards the nursing profession at the college of nursing, University of Duhok. This study indicated that the nursing students have positive perceptions including pride in their professionalism toward the nursing profession in the four aspects of **the description of the profession, social view perspectives, benefits of the nursing profession, and students' satisfaction in nursing**. The finding of the current study is indicative of the international literature in which students showed positive perception toward the nursing profession including USA [11], Canada [12], two studies in Bahrain [6, 13], Jordan [10], Taiwan [14], Egypt and Jordan [1], and Albania [15]. The sample characteristics of the current study reflect the distribution of nursing students in Kurdistan Region universities in which the number of male nursing students is less than female (93 versus 183). Although admission to nursing programs in Kurdistan Region is competitive and based on high school grades, however, due to the rules and regulations of the ministry of higher education and scientific research, female has more

opportunity to be accepted into nursing and with low grades than male in believing that nursing is a feminine profession. Despite this, many male students are moving toward this profession as a livelihood job that was also socially acceptable to be a male nurse many years ago. Contrary findings were found in the literature concerning cultural views of the nursing profession. In Turkey, for example, the nursing profession is considered a female profession, and from the social perspective, the image of a nurse is considered feminine [16]. These negative gender stereotypes pervade societal views and subsequently affect the number of nurses that remain in the profession. Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence that in some countries, culturally is not appropriate for females to take care of male patients and that female nurses are unacceptable from a social perspective. In Saudi Arabia for example, Al-Omar [17] conducted a study among high school students about their perceptions of nursing as a future career. He found that the main reasons why Saudi females did not choose nursing as a career were, mixing with members of the opposite gender, social image, cultural and communal values, long working hours, family discouragement, and the worry of not being a "marriageable" prospect. Another study in Saudi Arabia found that the enrollment of female students in the nursing profession has been objected to by Saudi parents because of religious matters as females and males will work together in a mixed working environment and spend the long working hours and shifts duty that makes them away from home [18]. Moreover, in Bahrain, there is evidence indicating that, culturally, it is not appropriate for a female nurse to take care of male patients due to working night shift duty in believing that the role of females is to be mothers and wives [13]. One of the suggestions to solve this issue raised by Al-Kandari and Lew [19], was to encourage and increase the number of male nurses and educators to join nursing programs that will strengthen the status of the nursing profession. Moreover, this will help provide more male nurses to care for male clients, thus solving some of the socio-cultural problems encountered by female nurses [8].

Another aspect of the students' characteristics of the current study was the reasons for enrollment at the college of nursing. According to the literature, students' change in perception of nursing as an ideal career choice is the main reason for attrition in nursing studies [12]. The current study revealed that the highest percentage of students have chosen the nursing profession because of their high school grades followed by their own interest (desire to help others). These findings were in line with a comparative study done by Ibrahim et al, (2015) between Egyptian and Jordanian nursing students that showed the main reason for the enrollment of the students of both countries was due to secondary school grades. On the other hand, these findings were contrary to the previous studies done in different countries in which the primary reason was the desire to care for and help others in the United States [11], Canada [20], Ireland [21], Australia [22], Bahrain [13], and Saudi Arabia [18, 23]. It is argued that in some developing countries especially those with a low economic status such as Jordan, the main reason for choosing nursing as a career was financial reasons because nursing offers stable employment with high salaries [10, 24]. Moreover, in Egypt, a study conducted by Abdel El-Halem et al, (2011) concluded that around two-thirds of nursing students have chosen a nursing career as it represented a good opportunity for them to work in and outside the country. A number of studies have demonstrated that the major motivators of the student's enrollment in the nursing profession were the advice of family and friends which can be influential in the recruitment and retention of students [6, 26, 27]. A study by Betts, et al. [28], found that one of the non-academic factors influencing the retention of nursing students from nursing programs is lack of support from family. Therefore, early detection of this factor is vital in order to promote student success and reduce the attrition rate [28]. This study found that more than two-thirds of the students responded by having a nurse friend or relative. This can have a positive influence on encouraging career desires [1]. Similarly, Abdel El-Halem et al (2011), found a significant relationship between the presence of family support and entering the nursing profession. Furthermore, a study by Al Jarrah (2013), pointed out that family members were the most influential and supporting factors in the enrollment of students into the nursing field. The current study explored that, nearly half of the student's families were positive. This finding is essential since it actually reflects a positive image of the nursing profession in society [6]. In regard to the perception of participants **for the description of the nursing profession**, in general, they had a positive perception and high mean

scores in all items. This result is in congruence with many studies reported in the literature that used the same questionnaire. For example, a study done by Al Jarrah [10], found that more than half of the Jordanian nursing students had a positive perception of all items. Similarly, AbdelEl-Halem, et al. [25], found that the majority of the respondents in their study had a positive image toward nursing as a profession. Inconsistent with the literature, most of the respondents of this study disagreed and strongly disagreed that nursing is a feminine profession. The result of this study is congruent with a comparative study done by Gaber and Mostafa [29] between Egyptians students and Saudi students. Both study subjects refused to see the nursing profession to be a female profession. However, unlike other studies, a contradictory finding has been reported in the literature in which nursing is a female profession. In China, for example, a study revealed that male students perceived the nursing profession to be suitable for females. They feel it seems odd and awkward for male students to perform nursing skills [30]. In Bahrain, Sanad and Awadhalla [6], concluded that slightly more than half of the Bahraini nursing students agreed that nursing is a feminine profession. In Turkey, a study by Kulakac, et al. [31], showed that most of the participants in their study had difficulty accepting the image of men in nursing perhaps due to the social views of the Turkish culture.

Concerning the **social view perspectives** of the students toward the nursing profession, the result of the present study showed that almost all students agreed upon statements reflecting a positive perception of the nursing profession for all societal view items. Societal view plays a valuable role in recruitment, retention, and attrition to the nursing profession. In China, for example, Wang et al. (2011), stated that the main negative feeling about studying nursing especially, among male students is the perception of low social status felt by the students, which hinders them from embarking on the nursing profession. In the same line in Saudi society, a female who chooses the nursing profession suffers from a poor image, which considers nursing as a job for "maids" or uneducated women (Miligi and Selim, 2014). While in Turkey, Başkale and Serçekuş (2015), stated that students in our study claimed that nurses are still perceived as intermediate staff or the doctor's handmaidens, and this stereotypical view reflects societal prejudices. The respondents of the present study had a positive perception in all items regarding the perception of nursing students about **the benefits of the nursing profession**. The majority of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that the nursing profession is beneficial for students as well as patients. However, according to the finding, obviously, students have chosen nursing due to high school grades rather than a desire to help others ($P=0.0249$). This might be due to the fact that nursing offers many job opportunities and suitable salaries in the Kurdistan Region. There is sufficient evidence in the literature to support this point of view. Ibrahim, et al. [1], in their study, found that nursing students in Egypt and Jordan have a positive perception regarding the benefits of the nursing profession. This is perhaps because it is an attractive job and provides the accessibility of work whether in Arab or Western countries. Moreover, it offers real work choices, and graduates are immediately employed with suitable salaries. Likely, in the USA, a notional survey found that nursing students perceived nursing as a good career for men and for people who have the academic ability and want a secure job [11]. Concerning the last aspect: **students' satisfaction in nursing**, similarly to other mentioned aspects, students had a positive perception in all items and the means scores were above 3. Except in item No 24 (I would like my child to become a nurse), they have a negative view. The findings of the present study were in congruence with the international literature. For example, Al Jarrah [10] explored that the respondents of his study held positive perceptions toward nursing and were noticeably satisfied with all items except the item "I would like my child to become a nurse". On contrary, a survey of 496 American nursing students was obtained through a national campaign to attract people into the nursing profession. The majority of the students believed that nursing is physically challenging and there is inadequate respect and recognition of nurses [11]. Likewise, a descriptive survey was done by Law and Arthur [32], in Hong Kong in attempts to identify the secondary school perception in nursing. They found that more than half of the students held negative perceptions as they conceive a view that nursing is a low-status profession and are not willing to study nursing programs. In terms of students' age, there were significant differences between 17-20 years old versus 21-30 years old ($P=0.0261$) this apparently means that the early twentieth age group

was more satisfied in nursing than the late twentieth age group. In this regard, a qualitative study is needed to clarify the reason behind age-related factors toward students' satisfaction in nursing. Additionally, there were highly significant differences ($P < 0.0001$) among stages of students in terms of students' satisfaction with nursing. Obviously, in the third stage, students are less to be satisfied than students in the first, the second, and the fourth stage. This finding was out of the researcher's expectations and needs further investigation to identify the reason behind this discrepancy among stages of the nursing program. In the same line, in Canada, a study by Grainger and Bolan [12], found that first-year students were more positive that nursing is a respected profession than the students of other stages. Beginning students in this study were also held to the beliefs that nursing is exciting and that nurses feel well about what they do.

The last two questions of this study investigated students' feelings when talking with others as well as factors that improved the image of nursing after joining the nursing program. In general, students held positive views concerning their feelings about nursing when talking with others. More than half of the students responded by feeling proud when talking with others about nursing. Unexpectedly some students had a very negative attitude and they attacked the nursing profession when talking with others; this was out of the researcher's expectations additionally, the researcher of the current study found no international literature in which nursing students attack the nursing profession. This is a major concern and should be seriously taken into consideration as it can lead to a student's attrition in the nursing program. Furthermore, if nursing students attack their careers, then how can they devote their life taking care of the sick?. Concerning the last question of this study, a high percentage of the respondents believed that clinical training was the most frequent factor that improved the image of nursing after joining the nursing program followed by the nature of nursing work. These results are in line with the findings of some other studies. A study in Bahrain found that parents and the influence of registered nurses were the most common motivators of students' choice of nursing and career [6]. Some respondents of the current study also believed that college members had an impact on improving their image of nursing. This is consistent with the literature which showed that effective support for the students from knowledgeable and experienced practitioners is a valuable contribution to realizing their aims, this, in turn, has a profound influence on their decision as to whether continue with their nursing studies or leaving it [2]. This study found that, having a nurse friend or relative is an important predictor of joining nursing students in the faculty of nursing. This study also explored that students of the second and third stages were more positive from a societal perspective than students of the fourth stage. The reason for this discrepancy among students' stages might be due to the fact that students of the fourth stage had more interaction with society as they had subjects related to the community such as community health nursing and they did some home visiting this might have affected them. A further qualitative study is needed to explore the reason behind this phenomenon.

4. Conclusion

This study is the first to report on undergraduate nursing students' perceptions of the nursing profession in Iraqi Kurdistan. Consistent with other studies, the current study concluded that students have positive perceptions in relation to four aspects of the nursing profession: description of the profession, social view perspectives, benefits of the nursing profession, and students' satisfaction in nursing. High school grades were regarded as the main reason for joining the faculty of nursing. Having a nurse friend or relative and positive family reactions were perceived as positive influential factors for student enrollment in the nursing program. Contrary to the findings of previous studies, the respondents of this study did not have negative stereotypes about which nursing as a feminine profession. This study found that perceptions of nursing students toward the nursing profession were positively correlated with the benefits of the nursing profession. Furthermore, the benefits of the nursing profession were the main predictor of joining nursing students in nursing programs. The subjects did not wish nursing to be the career choice of their children. The early twentieth age group respondents were more satisfied in nursing than the late twentieth age group. More than half of the students responded by feeling proud when talking with others about nursing. Although few students had a very negative attitude and

attacked the nursing profession when talking with others, this was out of the researcher's expectations; this raises warnings and should be taken seriously as it can lead to student attrition in the nursing program. Lastly, a majority of respondents believed that clinical training and the nature of nursing work were significant factors that improved the image of nursing after joining the faculty of nursing.

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Reference

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