

## Values and Professional Role Perceptions of Nursing Students: Cross-sectional Survey in Turkey and Lithuania

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**Key Words:** value system, terminal values, instrumental values, role perceptions, nursing students.

**Summary.** Values are conceived as guiding principles in life which transcend specific situations, may change over time, guide selection of behaviour and events, and are part of a dynamic system with inherent contradictions. A well-developed value system helps nurses find solutions to ethical dilemmas.

**Objectives.** This study identifies the values and professional role perceptions among Turkish and Lithuanian nursing students, who come from different cultural backgrounds.

**Methods:** A descriptive, cross-sectional, correlational design was applied in this study. A cross-sectional survey was based on the Rokeach Value Survey and Nursing Role Perception Questionnaire. Surveys were conducted at the Acibadem University and the Lithuanian University of Health Science. The participants were students of the nursing programme. The study was approved by the Bioethics Centre at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and an ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Acibadem University

**Results.** Study results revealed statistically significant differences between priorities of instrumental and terminal values in both countries. An analysis of average factor scores indicates that the average score of the first factor Breadth of Professional Outlook and the sixth factor Level of Rapport with Patients and Colleagues were statistically significantly higher among the Lithuanian nursing students compared with the Turkish nursing students.

**Conclusion.** Lithuanian and Turkish students of nursing programmes emphasised the importance of such values as family security, tranquillity and freedom and had different perceptions about the nurse's role in health care.

### Introduction

The scientific study of human values has a long tradition in the fields of psychology and sociology. Values are conceived as guiding principles in life which transcend specific situations, may change over time, guide selection of behaviour and events, and are part of a dynamic system with inherent contradictions (1, 2). The thinking about the nature of human values has been largely influenced by the work of Milton Rokeach. He defined the value concept as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (3). Rokeach distinguished terminal values (such as world peace, wisdom, and happiness), which are preferred end-states of existence, and instrumental values (such as responsibility and cooperation), which are preferred modes of conduct (3). This distinction is

important because it addresses two major questions in life: What do I want to achieve? and How do I want to achieve it? (4). Nursing is a profession that provides 24-hour service to all persons. When providing these services, nurses confront a variety of situations that require to make the best clinical and moral judgement for patients (5).

Despite enormous changes in society and the way that nurse education and training is delivered, nursing is arguably still underpinned by key values and beliefs. A well-developed value system helps nurses find solutions to ethical dilemmas (5). Developing professional values in nursing is important because of care quality and increase of patient's understanding; it also helps the professional socialisation process (4). Values are acquired; they can be taught directly or learned indirectly by observing the behaviour of others. Nursing values are internalised through professional socialisation – the process of learning or understanding the nature of being a nurse (6). Values have a major influence on the actions of practitioners and are integral to socialisation and consequent development of professional identity (7, 8).

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The choice of profession is a complicated process which is affected by many factors and at the same time it differs among countries and cultures. Individuals develop an attitude related to their profession over time, reflecting their various psychological actions which are influenced by environmental conditions as well as their personal characteristics (9, 10). The rapid growth of nursing alumni affects the attitudes of students towards the professional perception, nursing practices, students themselves and the people around them. In order to understand attitudes of nursing students towards nursing, it is important to identify their thoughts about nursing roles (11, 12, 13).

Nurses are key players in a transforming health care system, and they have to understand the factors driving these changes, the competencies that will be needed and their role in the health care team (14).

While the choice of profession varies between countries and cultures, the qualifications of the profession are influenced by individual characteristics. Human behaviour differs all around the world and is mainly affected by the values of individuals (4). A study of Karadağlı, which was conducted in Turkey, emphasised the importance of developing individualised decisions and awareness of nurses' own values for the effective care and structuring nursing education in this way (11).

Nursing practice is a part of the social structure and is influenced by political, economic and social events. In addition, factors such as different levels of development and different cultural, political and linguistic structures of countries result in a unique nursing concept in every single country (15). Nursing profession in Turkey and Lithuania shows similar characteristics in terms of having an important position in health systems and the number of students increasing day by day. This study assumes the identification and comparison of values and professional role perceptions among Turkish and Lithuanian nursing students, with two different cultural backgrounds contributing to the science discipline of nursing.

The questions of this study are as follows:

Are there any differences between instrumental and terminal values of Lithuanian and Turkish nursing students?

Are there any differences between professional role perceptions of Lithuanian and Turkish nursing students?

## Methods

*Research Design.* A descriptive, cross-sectional, correlational design was applied in this study.

*Instruments.* The questionnaire consists of three parts: the Rokeach Value Survey, the Nursing Role Perception Questionnaire and socio-demographic

characteristics. The Rokeach Value Survey was developed by Milton Rokeach in 1967. The inventory contains two sub-dimensions as terminal and instrumental values, having 18 values in each dimension. Terminal values refer to the basic goals of life, while instrumental values refer to behaviours used in order to achieve these goals. On the scale, each participant was asked to read each value, rank them, and indicate what was very important to him or her or what was contrary to his or her values together with its ranking. The participants were asked to identify their priorities in the range of 1–18, where 1 stands for the most important value and 18 for the least. Reliability coefficients were found to vary between 0.13 and 0.78 for terminal values and between 0.12 and 0.62 for instrumental values.

The Nursing Role Perception Questionnaire (NRPQ) was developed by MacKay in 2004 (16). The Nursing Role Perception Questionnaire is used specifically for measuring the perception of the role of a nurse. The NRPQ is a Likert-type questionnaire consisting of 22 questions and 7 subgroups that measure the views of the nursing role of another health care profession. A scale of 1 to 10 was used. It is a linear scale, which was very easy to interpret.

Following the technique of inverse translation, a translated and validated Lithuanian version of the questionnaire was used in this study. The internal consistency of the 22-item questionnaire was determined using a Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Its value was 0.94. In addition, the questionnaire was translated into the Turkish language and validated by Şahin et al. (17). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this version of the questionnaire was 0.82.

The final part of the instrument was devoted to description of respondent socio-demographic characteristics.

*Sampling and Setting.* The study was conducted among the students from the Nursing programmes of the Acibadem University (Turkey) and the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (Lithuania). The study sample consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students (264) of the Acibadem University Nursing programme and the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students (217) of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences Nursing programme. The response rate was 64.2% with 309 participants. The sample included 129 female and 4 male participants from Lithuania and 156 female and 20 male participants from Turkey.

One of the authors personally distributed questionnaires to all 481 eligible nursing students in Lithuania and Turkey during the spring semester lasting from 1 April to 1 June in 2017.

*Data Analysis.* Statistical analysis of the research data was performed with the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 programme, and descriptive statistical methods

(mean, standard deviation, frequency), were used. Rank mean values and ranks were used for the determination of value priorities. The relationship between two independent variables was assessed by calculating the Mann Whitney U test, taking into consideration its statistical significance (reliability notation:  $P < 0.05$  means statistically significant, and  $P < 0.01$  means highly significant). Significance was assessed at a 95% confidence interval,  $P < 0.05$ .

**Ethical Considerations.** The study was approved by the Bioethics Centre at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (No. BEC-MF-412), and an ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Acıbadem University (AT-ADEK-2017/8).

Research was carried out in accordance with ethical principles of scientific research, the Declaration of Helsinki. In addition, verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant of the study following an explanation of the research goals. Confidentiality of respondents was assured. Anonymity was maintained, as the respondents were never asked for any identifiers such as their names, surnames, or addresses. The collected data were summarised, reported in the aggregate and used only for scientific purposes. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the data protection rights, and the right to refuse participation in the study or to terminate the participation without reasoning or penalty. Survey methodology was applied with a minimal risk or harm to study participants.

## Results

Priorities of Instrumental and Terminal Values in Lithuania and Turkey. Study results revealed sta-

tistically significant differences between priorities of instrumental values in both countries. According to the Lithuanian nursing students, ambition and capability (rank 3 and 4, respectively) were perceived as the most important values. In contrast, the Turkish nursing students prioritised being honest and helpful, logical and obedient. Referring to life goals, the Lithuanian nursing students perceived being obedient as the least important value. There were statistically significant differences between these values (Table 1).

An analysis of terminal value priorities in two countries indicated that both Lithuanian and Turkish nursing students perceived family security as the most important value (rank 2). When countries were compared according to the Rokeach Values Inventory, a statistically significant difference was found between the scores of terminal values of A Comfortable Life, A World of Beauty, Equality and An Exciting Life. The scores of nursing students in Turkey were lower than those of nursing students in Lithuania (Table 2).

**Nursing Role Perception in Lithuania and Turkey.** An analysis of average domain scores indicated that the average score of the first domain Breadth of Professional Outlook was statistically significantly higher among the Lithuanian nursing students compared with the Turkish nursing students (3.94 and 3.66, respectively;  $P = 0.006$ ). This may indicate that the Turkish nursing students are more focused on the medical side of their work, communicate more with other professionals, have a better expressed objective medical point of view and work more effectively in a team. Furthermore, the average score of the sixth domain Level of Rapport

Table 1. Rankings and Composite Rank Orders of Instrumental Values of Nursing Students

Instrumental Values	Lithuanian Students (n=133)		Turkish Students (n=176)		P
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	
Ambition (hard-working, aspiring)	4.07	3	7.13	8	0.001**
Capability (competent, effective)	4.41	4	7.70	8	0.001**
Cheerfulness (light hearted, joyful)	8.72	9	4.89	5	0.001**
Courage (standing up for your beliefs)	6.34	6	5.36	6	0.006**
Helpful (working for the welfare of others)	6.68	7	4.65	4	0.001**
Honest (sincere, truthful)	3.94	3	3.48	2	0.026*
Imaginative (daring, creative)	6.61	7	6.66	7	0.815
Logical (consistent, rational)	5.71	6	4.63	4	0.001**
Loving (affectionate, tender)	6.87	7	5.60	6	0.001**
Obedient (dutiful, respectful)	9.11	10	5.73	6	0.001**
Responsible (dependable, reliable)	3.59	3	4.15	4	0.216

Mann Whitney U test \* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ .

Table 2. Rankings and Composite Rank Orders of Terminal Values of Nursing Students

Terminal Values	Lithuanian Students (n=133)		Turkish Students (n=176)		P
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	
Comfortable Life (a prosperous life)	6.92	7	5.63	6	0.001**
Sense of Accomplishment (a lasting contribution)	4.53	4	5.49	6	0.001**
Tranquillity	4.78	4	4.64	4	0.353
A world beauty (beauty of nature and the arts)	9.42	10	7.52	8	0.001**
Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)	6.82	7	4.93	5	0.001**
Family Security (taking care of loved ones)	2.36	2	2.72	2	0.256
Freedom (independence, free choice)	4.80	4	4.75	5	0.968
Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)	4.78	4	4.32	4	0.094
Pleasure (an enjoyable leisurely life)	8.57	9	7.40	8	0.001**
Social recognition (respect, admiration)	7.44	8	8.02	8	0.019*
True friendship (close companionship)	5.67	5	5.49	5	0.625

Mann Whitney U test \* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ .

with Patients and Colleagues was statistically significantly higher among the Lithuanian nursing students ( $P = 0.001$ ). Based on this, it may be presumed that they attribute to nurses the ability to establish good relationships with patient groups and the ability to work with a narrow profile patient group (7.14 and 6.04, respectively) (Table 3).

### Discussion

Instrumental and Terminal Values of Nursing Students. Our values do not only incite us to take a particular position in society, but also predispose us to prefer one particular philosophical, political or religious ideology than others. They determine the way we present ourselves in front of others and the framework we use in order to persuade and influence others. Our values are the basic assumptions, allowing us to rationalise beliefs, attitudes and actions that would otherwise be unacceptable personally or socially. Because of that, we can reserve our feelings of morality and competence, which are an important essential element of self-esteem (4, 18). In this context, nursing education programmes that shape the values of future nurses, their professional attitudes and professional identity are very important.

A study conducted by Kaya et al. has found that in evaluating their personal values nursing students ranked social values in the first place (19). The findings of our study are very similar. Both Lithuanian and Turkish nursing students indicated family security as one of the most important life goals (terminal value). Furthermore, our study participants considered tranquillity (life without fighting and conflicts) and freedom (independence,

free choice) as important values. It may be presumed that in the world full of wars, lacking sufficient social and psychological stability, Generation Y seeks security. Irrespective of the fact that the respondents grew up in different cultural, social and religious environment, their life goals are the same, namely, security, freedom and free choice.

Statistically significant differences were found during the assessment of terminal value priorities based on the country. The Turkish nursing students ranked the value of equality higher compared with the Lithuanian nursing students. It may be presumed that it reflects the lower level of democracy in a society. Our study results confirm findings of Kaya et al., namely, that the nursing students ranked political values very high (6).

Analysis of instrumental values showed that nursing students in both countries ranked honesty and responsibility among the most important values. A study conducted by Johnson et al. on changes in self-reported values of nursing students over the period 1983–2005 found that value of altruism and honesty in nursing students increased (20). This finding was further confirmed by a study carried out by Rassin, where honesty, responsibility and intelligence were rated first (21).

Thorpe and Loo have identified that helpfulness was among the most important values of nursing department students (22). In another study conducted by Keskin and Yıldırım, responsibility and helpfulness were identified among the five most important instrumental values (18).

Our study revealed statistical differences between the countries. The Lithuanian nursing students ranked the value of ambition (hard working,

aspiring) very high compared with the Turkish nursing students (rank 3 and rank 8, respectively). This high position of this value may be explained by the fact that the nursing profession in Lithuania has evolved during the last 25 years; out of an assisting profession, it has become an independent branch of science, and nursing career opportunities have expanded both horizontally and vertically (23). In contrast, the value of being obedient was ranked as the least important by the Lithuanian nursing students, while the Turkish nursing students ranked it as the sixth in importance. Findings of the study conducted by Rassin are very similar to ours. Nurses rated values of being honest (sincere, truthful) and responsible (dependable, reliable) as the first in importance. Values such as ambition and being obedient (dutiful, respectful) were positioned as the least important ones (21).

To summarise the research of many authors, it may be maintained that the formation of values is influenced by the culture of the country, professional education, training, and experience.

**Nursing Role Perception.** The aim of nursing study programmes is to train students to work in an interprofessional team, to learn to understand the role of each health care professional and their own role on the team.

Collaboration between professionals is important in health institutions where most activities are team-performed. Ineffective nurse-physician collaboration affects patient outcome, nurses' job satisfaction and organisational cost and is challenged by personal, interpersonal and organisational factors (24).

The term "professional role" refers to culturally defined patterns of behaviour, centred on a social function and corresponding to social expectations. The role of nursing is a multidimensional expression which includes clinical, administrative, educational, and research roles, which emerge according to the needs of each field and workplace (25).

Amsalu et al. analysed attitudes of nurses towards nurse-physician collaboration in a team. This study identified that neither nurses nor physicians were satisfied with their current collaboration and nurses demonstrated less satisfaction with the current nurse-physician collaboration. As compared with physicians, nurses had more favourable attitudes towards collaboration specifically toward nurses' contributions to the psychosocial and educational aspects of patient care, and stronger rejection of a totally dominant physician role (26).

Another study analysed how registered nurses perceived their role on team work with nurse practitioners. This study revealed that registered nurses favourably evaluated nurse practitioners as competent colleagues with whom they worked comfortably, asked for advice and consultations. They saw

the role of the nurse practitioners as a positive addition to the health care team (27).

In our study, we analysed how future nurses perceive their future profession in a clinical setting. The study results revealed that the Lithuanian students of the nursing programme rated the first domain Breadth of Professional Outlook in a statistically significantly higher place, which indicates that future nurses emphasise the clinical rather than social side of their work, they have a holistic approach, are capable of communication with other health care professionals, effectively work on a team and apply the objective medical approach to problem solving. In addition, the sixth domain was rated higher by the Lithuanian respondents compared with the Turkish respondents. This domain indicates that the Lithuanian nursing students believe that it is more important to establish good relationships with patient groups rather than individual patients.

Perceptions of their own role are crucial in shaping the professional identity of future specialists. A clear perception of your own professional role is a major part (of the process) of professional socialisation, which as a significant topic of personal development, is the process of the internalisation of professional values, norms and ethical requirements into the students' behaviour and self-concept (27).

**Strength and Limitations of the Study.** The main strength of this study is related to the fact that it is one of the few studies that analyses nursing students' values and perceptions of the professional role. It is very important in the light of the free movement of persons, the harmonisation of the nursing professionals training in Europe and the provision of high-quality services irrespective of geographical location. The study results will be useful in training nursing professionals and will contribute to the development of evidence-based nursing practice.

One of the limitations of this study is related to the fact that while assessing the value orientations of nursing students there was no analysis of the influence of socio-economic factors of a particular country on the formation of these values. The general assessment of values was carried out in respect of the whole cohort. During the assessment of the Nursing Role Perception, there was no analysis of the study programme of a specific university in each country and how many credits in the study programme were devoted to the introduction to the profession and interprofessional subjects.

## Conclusion

Lithuanian and Turkish students of nursing programs emphasised the importance of such values as family security, tranquillity (life without fighting and

conflicts) and freedom (independence, free choice). Role perceptions of nursing students differed because of different socio-cultural environment and prestige of the nursing profession. Awareness of values and beliefs of future nursing professionals, their professional role perceptions and self-positioning among other members of a team may provide valuable information for nurse educators in designing more effective teaching strategies.

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### Conflict of Interest

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