



ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Determination of Metaphorical Perceptions of Nursing Students Regarding Pediatric Nursing

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the perceptions of nursing students in the 3rd and 4th grades regarding pediatric nursing through metaphors. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research was conducted with 152 students enrolled in the nursing department in the spring semester of 2022-2023 who were taking the Pediatric Health and Diseases Nursing course. A data form containing fill-in-the-blank questions querying students' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of pediatric nursing ("Pediatric nursing is like..., because..." metaphorical sentence) was utilized. The data were analyzed using content analysis technique. The analysis was performed using SPSS 25.0 statistical package program. Of the participants, 53.9% were female, with 57.2% aged 22 and above. These students generated 40 distinct metaphors. The positive metaphorical association with pediatric nursing was significantly negatively impacted by a reluctance to work in pediatric services by a factor of 7.1 and by being a third-year student by a factor of 3.8 ($p < 0.05$). The students used the metaphors of mother (28.9%), angel (9.9%), and family (7.9%) for pediatric nursing. Additionally, the caregiving role emerged as the predominant metaphorical perception associated with pediatric nurses, accounting for 63.2% of responses. Conversely, negative associations included the metaphors caregiver ($f=7$), chaos ($f=3$), and rocky road ($f=3$). A majority of students (85.5%) utilized positive metaphorical constructs to depict "pediatric nursing." It is recommended to identify expectations regarding pediatric nursing, enhance motivation towards the profession, and improve working conditions.

Introduction

Pediatric nurses are defined as nurses responsible for the physical, cognitive, emotional and social care and improvement of children between the ages of 0-18 within the family and society in terms of intellectual and social aspects, in line with universal children's rights and professional nursing roles (Çetinkaya et al., 2017).

The primary purpose of pediatric nurses are to ensure the physical, emotional and social development/maturation of the child and adolescent within the family and society in terms of intellectual and social aspects (Keklik and Çetinkaya, 2019). They play an important role in providing child and family-centered health services. In various areas such as protecting, promoting and improving health, monitoring

growth and development, addressing health-threatening conditions, preventing and managing acute and chronic diseases, and restoring health in the event of illness, children, they facilitate collaboration between families and healthcare teams (Conk et al., 2013; Karakul et al., 2022; Turan, 2022).

To provide appropriate health services in pediatric nursing, a comprehensive assessment of the child, including physical, mental and emotional aspects, is essential. This approach, known as holistic nursing care, emphasises efforts to promote the child's rehabilitation, accelerate recovery and improve the quality of life within a holistic framework. Pediatric nurses are responsible for ensuring continuity and coordination in holistic health services (Takase and Teraoka,

2011; Sözeri et al., 2016; Aydın and Hıçdurmaz, 2019; Çınar, 2022).

A metaphor involves describing one's feelings and thoughts about a concept in the most immediate manner that comes to mind (Zembat et al., 2015; Demir and Yıldırım, 2019). In other words, metaphors are an effective method in determining individuals' perceptions, solving problems and creating a mental model (Keskin et al., 2019). Metaphors are employed to make the concepts more comprehensible and concrete (Karadağ and Kaya, 2020). Various concepts are utilized to comprehend the duties, knowledge, skills, and attitudes in pediatric nursing within the context of holistic healthcare (Karadağ and Kaya, 2020). Each individual may have a different perception and understanding of these concepts (Erişti et al., 2013). "Metaphors can be an effective tool used to determine how students understand concepts and to facilitate the teaching of concepts." Despite the intricate nature of concepts in pediatric nursing, the use of metaphors enhances comprehension. Each nursing student should be seen as a future healthcare professional, and their perceptions about the profession should be evaluated in detail. Having positive perceptions about the profession among pediatric nurses can influence their adaptability to the profession, their ability to provide quality healthcare services, and their professional performance. Therefore, efforts must prioritize fostering positive perceptions and mitigating negative ones from early in students' education (Dimitriadou et al., 2015; Özmen and Çetinkaya, 2016; Yang et al., 2021).

While studies have explored nurses' and nursing students' perceptions through metaphors (Karakul et al., 2022; Turan, 2022), there is limited research on pediatric nursing, particularly concerning its care for vulnerable populations. This study aims to examine nursing students' perceptions of pediatric nursing through metaphors, examining the factors shaping these metaphors' content, with a focus on students enrolled in the Pediatric Health and Diseases Nursing course.

Research Questions

How did 3rd and 4th-year nursing students describe their perceptions of 'pediatric nursing' using which metaphors?

What are the variables influencing the generated metaphors?

Material and Methods

Research Type

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing the "phenomenological" type of metaphor technique. This method facilitates the concretization of reality by describing individuals' thoughts and perspectives (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2011). Through the metaphor technique, genuine perceptions of nursing students enrolled in the Children's Health and Diseases Nursing course regarding pediatric nursing were accessed.

Place and Timing of the Research

The research was conducted with 3rd and 4th-year students studying in the nursing department of the University's Health Sciences Faculty. Data were collected online via Google Form between May and June 2022.

Research Universe/Sample

The research population comprised third and fourth-year students enrolled in the nursing department of the Health Sciences Faculty during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. Given the phenomenological nature of the study, research was conducted with individuals and groups present at the time, without resorting to sample selection (Kocabıyık, 2016). The aim was to reach all third and fourth-year students (164 students); however, due to reasons such as unwillingness to participate or failure to contact the students, 160 individuals participated in the research. Eight forms were excluded due to reasons such as incomprehensible expressions, lack of similarity with the reasons for the generated metaphors, or failure to explain the relevant concept. The research was completed with data from 152 individuals. In the information form, transitioning to the next question without answering the previous one was not allowed. Thus, the forms were completed without any missing data, and there was no sample loss.

Inclusion criteria

- Voluntary participation in the research
- Ability to read and write in Turkish
- Absence of any physical or communication barriers
- Enrollment in the third or fourth year of the nursing program
- Taking the 'Children's Health and Diseases Nursing' course

Exclusion Criteria

- Not taking or failing the 'Children's Health and Diseases Nursing' course
- Unwillingness to participate in the research
- Participant's desire to withdraw from the study at any stage
- Use of inappropriate metaphors in responses, similar to the rationale for exclusion

Variables of the Research

Independent variables include age, gender, marital status, number of siblings, parental status, satisfaction with the nursing department, interest in paediatric nursing, willingness to work in pediatric services, grade. The dependent variable is the use of positive metaphors to describe pediatric nursing.

Data Collection Tools

Data were obtained using a structured information form aligned with existing literature (Eşer et al., 2008; Limon and Durnalı, 2018; Karakul et al., 2022). The form consisted of two sections, one addressing students' descriptive characteristics (age, gender, marital status, number of siblings, parental status, satisfaction with the

nursing department, interest in pediatric nursing, willingness to work in pediatric services, grade) with nine questions. The second section contained blank-filled metaphorical sentences (A pediatric nurse is like..., because...) aimed at revealing participants' perceptions of pediatric nursing (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2017; Temel et al., 2018; Demir and Yıldırım, 2019).

Data Collection Procedure

Research data were amassed online. Participants were briefed on the research's intent via a Google Form, and their consent was obtained for engagement. Responding to inquiries typically took 3-4 minutes. The information form was structured to enforce completion of each question before progression to the subsequent one.

Data Assessment

Content analysis was used to assess metaphors related to 'pediatric nursing' (Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Küçük et al., 2020). Content analysis is the summarization of content categories by creating them through coding (Küçük et al., 2020). The obtained data were analyzed using the methods of examining the data, deriving meaning from the data, shaping the meaning in the data and categorizing. In line with the reasons, the data were divided into separate categories by the researchers.

Naming: Data were identified, similar concepts and themes were delineated and subsequently categorized. The formulated metaphors were coded accordingly (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2011).

Classification: The metaphors were independently assessed by two researchers. Concepts deemed inappropriate for evaluation as metaphors or with inadequate justifications were excluded from the analysis.

Category Development: The metaphors crafted by students underwent independent evaluation by two researchers. Concepts deemed unsuitable for metaphorical assessment or lacking appropriate justification were excluded from the analysis.

Category Formation: Metaphors were independently categorized by both researchers and subsequently compared. This comparison led to the reorganization of categories and metaphors. Metaphors were aggregated into two categories: positive and negative (Eraslan, 2011). Participants were denoted by the letter P and numbered from 1 to 152 (e.g., the first participant as P1, the second participant as P2). Among the explanatory texts, 40 metaphors created by students were considered for evaluation. The relevance of the generated metaphors to the research topic was taken into account during the analysis. Each metaphor describing a pediatric nurse was linked to the roles of a pediatric nurse. Following the analysis, the metaphors were categorized into nine distinct categories: caregiver, healer, educator, communicator, advocate, counselor, comforter, manager, and mixed roles.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (number, frequency, percentage) were employed for the descriptive characteristics of nursing students. Factors influencing the categorical status of metaphors were evaluated using Fisher/Pearson Chi-square tests. Multiple Logistic Regression analysis was conducted with significant factors identified through univariate statistics. The quantitative data obtained from the research were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 statistical software package.

Results

57.2% of students were aged 22 and above, 53.9% were female, 5.3% were married, 2.6% were parents, and 48.7% had five or more siblings. Majority of the participants (86.8%) expressed contentment with their department, while 71.1% expressed interest in pediatric nursing. Additionally, 73.7% indicated willingness to work in pediatric services, and 57.2% were fourth-year students (Table 1).

All metaphors associated with pediatric nursing were categorized into two groups: positive (135) and negative (17). The prevalence of positive metaphors was noted at 85.5%, contrasting with the 14.5% prevalence of negative metaphors.

The socio-demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, number of siblings, parental status) exhibited no significant impact on the usage of positive metaphors ($p > 0.05$). The level of positive metaphorical usage was found to be higher in those satisfied with studying in the Nursing department (88.6%) compared to those not satisfied (65.0%), in those interested in pediatric nursing (93.5%) compared to those not interested (65.9%), in those willing to work in the pediatric service (94.6%) compared to those willing (60.0%), and in those in the 4th grade (95.4%) compared to those in the 3rd grade (72.3%) ($p < 0.05$; Table 1).

Logistic regression analysis evaluated the variables collectively affecting the status of metaphors. The analysis revealed that the status of positive metaphors generated for pediatric nursing was negatively influenced by the reluctance to work in pediatric services by a factor of 7.1 and being a third-year student by a factor of 3.8 (Table 2).

The 152 participants in the study produced a total of 40 different metaphorical sentences. Notably, students most frequently utilized the metaphors of mother (28.9%), angel (9.9%), and family (7.9%) to describe pediatric nursing. The distribution of metaphors crafted by nursing students pertaining to pediatric nursing is delineated under each category heading in Table 3.

The created metaphors (positive, negative), justifications are given in Table 4 and sample expressions are determined as follows:

Participant's Expressions and Justifications for Positive Perceptions

Metaphors in the positive category often liken pediatric nursing to nurturing roles such as being a mother, angel, or family.

Being a pediatric nurse is like a beginning, because you learn something new with every child (P35).

Like a mother, because they are always protective, safe, and striving for the best for every moment (P106).

Being a pediatric nurse is like hope, because it gives hope for the recovery of children (P86).

Being a pediatric nurse is like breathing, because it gives life to children (P23).

Participant's Expressions and Justifications for Negative Perceptions

Upon examining the justifications for metaphors in the negative category, it's observed that the reasons are

related to the challenging and exhausting working conditions, the risks involved, the excessive workload in dealing with children, and additional job burdens.

Like walking on a rocky road, because dealing with children is very difficult (P93).

Like a caregiver, because you constantly need to meet their needs (P100).

Like flying, because it's both fun and risky (P21)

Being a pediatric nurse is like taking exams all the time, because it is very tiring, it is necessary to improve (P28).

Participants described the roles associated with 'pediatric nursing' as 63.2% caregiving, 14.5% therapeutic, and 5.3% educational (Table 5).

Table 1. Distribution of variables pertaining to students according to the status of metaphors describing pediatric nursing

Variables	n	%	Positive		Negative		χ^2	p
			n	%	n	%		
Age								
Below 22 years	65	42.8	53	81.5	12	18.5	0.95	0.3
22 years and above	87	57.2	77	88.5	10	11.5		
Gender								
Female	82	53.9	72	87.8	10	12.2	0.40	0.5
Male	70	46.1	58	82.9	12	17.1		
Marital Status								
Single	144	94.7	123	85.4	21	14.6	1.0	
Married	8	5.3	7	87.5	1	12.5		
Number of Siblings								
Less than 5	78	51.3	66	84.6	12	15.4	0.009	0.9
5 or more	74	48.7	64	86.5	10	13.5		
Parental Status								
No	146	96.1	125	85.6	21	14.4	1.0	
Yes	6	2.6	5	83.3	1	16.7		
Satisfaction with Nursing Department								
Yes	132	86.8	117	88.6	15	11.4	0.01	
No	20	13.2	13	65.0	7	35.0		
Interest in Pediatric Nursing								
Yes	108	71.1	101	93.5	7	6.5	17.08	<0.01
No	44	28.9	29	65.9	15	34.1		
Willingness to Work in Pediatric Services								
Yes	112	73.7	106	94.6	6	5.4	25.84	<0.01
No	40	26.3	24	60.0	16	40.0		
Grade								
3	65	42.8	47	72.3	18	27.7	14.21	<0.01
4	87	57.2	83	95.4	4	4.6		

Table 2. Logistic regression model of factors affecting the status of metaphors generated for pediatric nursing (Final model, step 3)

Variables	B	Standard deviation	p	OR	95% Confidence interval
Reluctance to work in pediatric services	1.97	0.56	<0.01	7.1	2.37-21.73
Being a third-year student	1.35	0.63	0.03	3.8	1.11-13.36

Table 3. Metaphors formulated by nursing students for pediatric nursing

Metaphor definition	n	%
Positive Metaphors		
Mother	44	28.9
Angel	15	9.9
Family	12	7.9
Mother and father	7	4.6
Hero	5	3.3
Sister/brother	5	3.3
Child	5	3.3
Teacher	4	2.6
Growing flowers	3	2.0
Rooted tree	3	2.0
Manager	3	2.0
Superman	2	1.3
Friendship	2	1.3
World	2	1.3
Hope	2	1.3
Lawyer	2	1.3
Assistant mother	2	1.3
Doctor	2	1.3
Relative	2	1.3
Life energy	1	0.7
Breath	1	0.7
Traffic light	1	0.7
Beginning	1	0.7
Life	1	0.7
Leaf	1	0.7
Beauty	1	0.7
Water	1	0.7
Gardening	1	0.7
Book	1	0.7
Tree branches	1	0.7
Pomegranate	1	0.7
Negative Metaphors		
Caregiver	7	4.6
Chaos	3	2.0
Architect	2	1.3
Exam	1	0.7
Tightrope walking	1	0.7
Flying	1	0.7
Rocky road	1	0.7
Engineer	1	0.7
Clown	1	0.7

* The n number indicates the frequency of each metaphor being reported

Table 4. Metaphors formulated by nursing students for pediatric nursing

Categories	Metaphors	Frequency
Positive Metaphors	Mother, Angel, Family, Mother and father, Hero, Sister/brother, Child, Teacher, Growing flowers, Rooted tree, Manager, Superman, Friendship, World, Hope, Lawyer, Assistant mother, Doctor, Relative, Life energy, Breath, Traffic light, Beginning, Life, Leaf, Beauty, Water, Gardening, Book, Tree branches, Pomegranate	135
Negative Metaphors	Caregiver, Chaos, Architect, Exam, Tightrope walking, Flying, Rocky road, Engineer, Clown	17
Total	40 metaphors	152

Table 5. Defining pediatric nursing roles through metaphor

Nursing Role	n	%
Caregiving (e.g., mother, family, beauty, gardening, sister/brother, nurturing flowers, caregiver, aunt, relative)	96	63.2
Therapeutic (doctor, world, angel, hero, hope, water, life, Superman, vitality, breath)	22	14.5
Educational (teacher, book, fruit-bearing tree, beginning, exam)	8	5.3
Communication (pomegranate, family, being a child, friend)	7	4.6
Advocacy (leaf, angel, lawyer)	6	3.9
Counseling (traffic light)	1	0.7
Mix (architect, acrobat, flying, engineer, chaos)	8	5.3
Soothing (clown)	1	0.7
Management (manager)	3	2.0
Total	152	100.0

Discussion

This research described the perceptions of nursing students regarding 'pediatric nursing' through metaphors. The metaphors primarily highlighted the nurturing aspect of pediatric nursing. The grounding of metaphors on the concept of parenthood reflects the nurturing aspect inherent in pediatric nursing (Karakul et al., 2022). Pediatric nurses are portrayed as professionals who provide compassionate care akin to familial bonds (Çınar, 2022). In this study, students preferred the metaphor of mother the most for the caregiving role of pediatric nurses (Özveren et al., 2018; Karakul et al., 2022; Karatana, 2023). Pediatric

nursing has been likened to motherhood due to its incorporation of values such as patience, dedication, compassion, and sacrifice (Fagin and Donna, 2000). The love-based relationship between mother and child facilitates the formation of positive bonds and enhances the child's sense of empowerment. The relationship between the pediatric nurse and the child resembles this situation. The positive relationship established between the child and the nurse, who desires to heal them, accelerates the child's adaptation to the hospital environment (Turan, 2022). Additionally, the study employed alternative allegorical frameworks to delineate the duties of pediatric nurses, who bear responsibility for a child's well-being. These included likening them to nurturing parents, devoted gardeners nurturing a seedling, and committed artists honing their craft over years (Özmen and Çetinkaya, 2016; Turan, 2022; Rolfe, 2019; Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021). The familial metaphor recurrently features in the portrayal of nurses' caregiving roles. Despite evolving structural dynamics within Turkish culture, the concept of family endures as a foundational entity where affection and reverence are manifested through actions. Pediatric nurses evoke the familial warmth by providing compassionate care to children from treatment initiation to discharge (Tomas, 2009; Canatan and Yıldırım, 2011; Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Karakul et al., 2022).

The second most frequently used metaphors were those describing the therapeutic role of pediatric nurses. Pediatric nurses were compared to doctors, heroes, and even superheroes due to their ability to heal and save the lives of fragile children. The concept of vitality was chosen to illustrate their improvement of children's quality of life. Nurses were metaphorically depicted as angels for their creation of a tranquil and secure environment conducive to healing for their patients. The research suggests that pediatric nurses positively impact the lives of children and families, making their lives easier (Mullan and Higgins, 2014). Both Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, and Safiye Hüseyin Elbi, a nursing pioneer in Turkey, viewed their profession as a divine calling (Yılmaz Gören and Yalım, 2016). Metaphors generated by students endowed pediatric nurses with exceptional abilities, reflecting the sacredness attributed to nursing (Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Özmen and Çetinkaya, 2016).

The third category of focused on the educational aspect of nurses. Pediatric nurses were likened to teachers, fruitful trees, and books for their roles in providing counseling to families and children, guiding them, and offering supportive care (Komprood, 2013; Sözeri et al., 2016). Teacher and book metaphors have been commonly employed in the literature to describe the educational role (Sözeri et al., 2016; Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021). Research has demonstrated that the educational role of pediatric nurses is effective in managing symptoms and improving patient outcomes (Musavi et al., 2021; Peixoto et al., 2021; Çınar 2022).

Metaphors offer insights into the perceived image of nursing (Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021). The study revealed the usage of both positive and negative

metaphors for pediatric nursing, yet an overall positive perception was evident. In another investigation, although pediatric nurses were likened to superheroes rescuing families and children in dire situations, the challenges of the profession were distinctly underscored (Turan, 2022).

A favorable perception of pediatric nursing among nursing students serves as a motivating factor for fulfilling professional responsibilities proficiently (Komprood, 2013). This study identified the simultaneous use of positive and negative metaphors for pediatric nursing, indicating an overall positive perception. While Özmen and Çetinkaya (2016) observed the coexistence of positive and negative metaphors in nursing descriptions, Yılmaz and Özbek Güven (2021) noted that students primarily employed positive metaphors to depict the profession and nursing (Gökdere-Çınar, 2019).

This study found that students with an interest in working in pediatric services tended to use more positive metaphors compared to their peers. Those who employed positive metaphors for pediatric nursing showed enthusiasm for working in pediatric services and a fondness for the pediatric department. The ability of pediatric nurses to interact lovingly with children and their interest in the pediatric field contribute to a favorable perception of the profession (Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021; Turan, 2022). On the other hand, pediatrics necessitates knowledge and experience. It was noted that fourth-year students, who underwent practical training in pediatric services and observed pediatric nurses, leaned towards more positive metaphors. During the research process, while fourth-year students engaged in hospital placements as part of their semester training, third-year students continued their Pediatric Nursing course remotely due to an earthquake. Hospital placements were deemed essential for students to gain insights into the profession and acquire practical nursing experience (Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021).

In the study, a small group of students used negative metaphors such as caregiver, chaos, exam, etc. Factors contributing to the formation of a negative perception among students include the challenging and risky nature of the patient population, the heightened need for attention and affection among children compared to other age groups, the requirement for proficient communication skills in the profession, demanding working conditions, and the continuous need for self-improvement. In the literature, negative metaphors such as robot, modern slavery, remote-controlled toy are encountered in reference to pediatric nurses. Stressful working conditions, high workload, and uncertainties in the nursing job description are cited as reasons for this perception (Yılmaz et al., 2014; Kale and Çiçek, 2015; Buckley et al., 2020). Nursing is often perceived as a less professional occupation and described as physician assistants in society (Kocabaş and Erdem, 2019). Surprisingly, none of the students used the physician assistant metaphor in the study. This outcome clearly indicates that students in the educational process

recognize the value of nursing and have a positive perception of the profession (Sapountzi-Krepia et al., 2007; Safadi et al., 2011; Özveren et al., 2018; Yılmaz and Özbek Güven, 2021).

The constraints of the study include its online conduct solely with nursing students from a single university, and the evaluation of metaphors by a limited number of researchers. Moreover, the seismic period's hindrance for third-year nursing students to partake in clinical practice and the online delivery of the pediatric nursing course may have influenced the constrained utilization of metaphors.

Conclusion

The study reveals that a significant portion of nursing students (73.7%) express interest in pursuing pediatric nursing. Students highlight pediatric nursing as a challenging and sensitive field with substantial responsibilities. Most of the students produced metaphors containing positive perceptions about their profession. It is imperative to identify the underlying reasons for perceived negative perceptions, alter students' viewpoints, and implement measures to counteract negative perceptions.

Identifying the metaphors employed by student nurses who have taken the Pediatric Health and Diseases Nursing course regarding pediatric nursing will aid in fostering professional awareness and sensitivity, as well as in addressing potential challenges. To address common challenges encountered by pediatric nurses in clinical settings, it is recommended to undertake project studies, ascertain students' professional expectations, and enhance working conditions.

Declarations

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

Authors disclose no potential conflicts of interest.

Ethics Statement

Ethical standards were complied with in the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's non-interventional clinical research ethics committee (12.10.2022/41) and the institution where the research was conducted.

Informed Consent

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: EB; methodology: EB, SG; software: EB, SG; validation: EB, SG; formal analysis: EB, SG; investigation: EB; data curation: EB, SG; writing-original draft: EB, SG; writing-review&editing: EB, SG; visualization: EB, SG; supervision: SG; project administration: EB, SG; funding acquisition: EB.

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Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study can be made available upon request to the corresponding author.

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