

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Being a Nursing Student in a Pandemic: Fear of COVID-19 and Clinical Practice

Pandemide Hemşirelik Öğrencisi Olmak: COVID-19 Korkusu ve Klinik Uygulama

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This research was conducted to examine the views of nursing students on fear of COVID-19 and clinical practice training during the pandemic process.

Methods: It is a descriptive study. Students studying in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades of a university providing undergraduate nursing education in Turkey were included in the study. Subjects were recruited from a population of 235 students. The data of the research; the data were collected using the Introductory Information Form prepared by the researchers by scanning the literature and the "COVID-19 Fear Scale". Number, percentage, and Kruskal Wallis H test were used to evaluate the data.

Results: The mean age of the students participating in the study was found to be 20.65 ± 1.36. Students; a significant difference was found between their attitudes towards patient care in clinical practice, their thoughts on the impact of their clinical practice on their social lives, students' thoughts about going to clinical practice, and their thoughts about experiencing pain, and their COVID-19 fear levels p<0.05.

Conclusion: It was concluded that students with high COVID-19 fear levels did not want to take part in patient care in clinical practice, were afraid of being excluded from social life, and preferred school practice instead of clinical practice. In line with these results, it may be recommended to provide psychological support to eliminate fears of COVID-19 to encourage students to clinical practice.

Keywords: clinical practice, COVID 19, fear, nursing, pandemic

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu araştırma, hemşirelik öğrencilerinin pandemi sürecinde COVID-19 korkusu ve klinik uygulama eğitimine ilişkin görüşlerini incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Tanımlayıcı bir çalışmadır. Araştırmaya Türkiye'de hemşirelik lisans eğitimi veren bir üniversitenin 2., 3. ve 4. sınıflarında öğrenim gören öğrenciler dahil edilmiştir. Katılımcılar 235 öğrencilik bir popülasyondan seçilmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri; veriler, araştırmacılar tarafından literatür taranarak hazırlanan Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu ve "COVID-19 Korku Ölçeği" kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde sayı, yüzde ve Kruskal Wallis H testi kullanıldı.

Bulgular: Araştırmaya katılan öğrencilerin yaş ortalaması 20.65 ± 1.36 olarak bulundu. Öğrenciler; klinik uygulamada hasta bakımına yönelik tutumları, klinik uygulamalarının sosyal yaşamlarına etkisine ilişkin düşünceleri, öğrencilerin klinik uygulamaya gitmeye ilişkin düşünceleri, korku seviyeleri ve ağrı hissetmeye ilişkin düşünceleri ile COVID-19 durumları arasında anlamlı bir fark bulundu. p<0.05.

Sonuç: COVID-19 korku düzeyi yüksek öğrencilerin klinik uygulamada hasta bakımında yer almak istemedikleri, sosyal hayattan dışlanmaktan korktukları ve klinik uygulama yerine okul uygulamasını tercih ettikleri sonucuna varıldı. Bu sonuçlar doğrultusunda öğrencileri klinik uygulamaya teşvik etmek için COVID-19 korkularını ortadan kaldırmak için psikolojik destek verilmesi önerilebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Klinik uygulama, COVID 19, korku, hemşirelik, pandemi

Introduction

Nursing education is a clinical practice-oriented education. Clinical practice provides the student with the opportunity to cope with the patient and the patient's problems develop the skills of synthesizing the knowledge learned in the lessons and practice patient care. In addition, the psychomotor and intellectual skills of the student can be improved with clinical practice. However, clinical practice is also important in terms of preparing students for future nursing roles (1,2). However, facing uncertain infectious disease threats during clinical practice during the pandemic period will increase the psychological pressure on students (3).

Extraordinary situations such as epidemics can arouse

fear in many people (4,5). The fact that students who practice clinical practice during the pandemic period are in the same environment as people who are likely to be infected or carriers and face the risk of COVID-19 transmission will create more stress on students compared to other segments of society (6).

This suggests that this situation will increase students' fear levels. In studies from different countries examining the stress level of nursing students during the pandemic period, it was found that the stress levels of nursing students were high (7-9). It has been concluded that negativities such as the fact that healthcare professionals are at the forefront during the pandemic period and the possibility of disease transmission to themselves and

their families will affect nursing students' perceptions of the profession (8). Stress is a particularly important issue in education as it has the potential to inhibit learning and performance (2). The high level of fear related to COVID-19 suggests that nursing students will increase their occupational stress levels and they may be reluctant to learn in the field of clinical practice. In line with all this information, this study was conducted to examine the views of nursing students on fear of COVID-19 and clinical practice training during the pandemic process.

Research Questions

1. Does fear of COVID-19 affect attitudes towards clinical practice?
2. What are the psychosocial concerns of the students due to COVID-19 regarding their attitudes towards clinical practice?

Methods

Design

This research was conducted in a descriptive type to examine the views of nursing students about the fear of COVID-19 and clinical practice training during the pandemic process.

Sample and setting

The recommended sample size was calculated as 147, based on the 95% confidence interval, 5% margin of error, and the expected 50% response distribution according to the sample calculation of the known universe. The sample of the study consisted of 201 students (n=235) who were studying in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades of the nursing department and agreed to participate in the research. It was aimed to reach the whole population without using the sample selection method. 22 students who did not want to participate in the research, 6 students who filled in the forms incompletely, and 6 students who were absent at the time of the research were excluded from the study. First-year students in the nursing department were not included in the study due to the lack of clinical practice during the course periods. The participation rate of nursing students in the research is 85.5%. The research was conducted with 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year nursing students enrolled in the fall semester at the university between November 1, 2021, and November 15, 2021. At that time, the number of daily cases in our country was between 20 thousand and 30 thousand. All students studying in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades of nursing and who agreed to participate in the research were included in the study.

Data collection

The data were prepared by the researchers by scanning the literature (6,8,10,11); It was collected

with the "Introductory Information Form" and the COVID-19 Fear Scale, which includes the descriptive characteristics of the students and their thoughts on clinical practice in the hospital during the pandemic period.

The questionnaire

Information Form: The introductory information form was prepared by the researchers in line with the relevant literature (6,8,10,11). The form consists of a total of 24 questions, including the socio-demographic characteristics of the students (10 questions) and the questions containing the students' thoughts on clinical practice (9 questions).

Questions about the difficulties experienced by students in clinical practice (9 questions).

In hospital practice, I do not want to collect data from the patient because of the fear that the patient may have COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to touch the patient in the hospital application.

During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to spend a lot of time in hospital practice to support patients psychologically and socially.

During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to do invasive procedures (such as injecting, and drawing blood) in hospital practice.

If I catch COVID-19 in the hospital application during the COVID-19 period, I do not want to go to the hospital practises because I am afraid of being away from my family.

I am afraid of the possibility of infecting people (family, friends, etc.) with whom they share the same place when returning to my living place at the end of the hospital application during the COVID-19 period.

I am afraid of being excluded from the place where I live (dormitory, apartment, etc.) because I went to the hospital during the COVID-19 period.

In the COVID-19 era, I would prefer the school application instead of the hospital application.

The thought of going to the hospital practice during the COVID-19 period causes pain in my body.

COVID-19 Fear Scale: COVID-19 Fear Scale, Ahorsu et al. (2020) (12). Sella et al. (2020) have adapted it into Turkish. The scale is a one-dimensional 7-item 5-point Likert type scale. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.84. CFA analyzes of the scale showed that all fit indices were within acceptable limits (χ^2 (13, N = 1304) = 299.47, $p < .05$; SRMR = .061; GFI = .936; NFI = .912; IFI = .915; CFI = .915). The scale consists of one dimension and there is no reverse item. A score between 7 and 35 is taken from the scale. A high score indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic fears level is 'high' (13). The Cronbach alpha value of our research is 0.78.

Application of research

Research forms were prepared in Google Docs online surveys. Oral information about the research was

given to the students who agreed to participate in the research to collect the data. Informed consent text explaining the purpose and information of the study and a consent box declaring their participation in the study were placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. Written consent was obtained with the consent box. The survey link was distributed to the students through social media groups where general announcements were made. Feedback was collected online during the research period via Google Docs.

Analysis of data

Data analysis was done with SPSS 23.0. Explanatory data were presented as number (n), mean, and percentage (%). Mann Whitney U test "Z" table value was used to compare the scale scores of the independent group. Obtained results were evaluated at a $p < 0.05$ significance level.

Ethics

To implement the research and collect data, permissions were obtained from the school where the research was conducted (permission numbered 19581359-605.01/04.12.2020), Selçuk University the Local Ethics Committee (decision permission numbered 2021/448), the scale permission used in data collection, and the

students who agreed to participate in the research. This study was conducted by the Helsinki Declaration of Good Clinical Practice Principles.

Results

The mean age of the students participating in the study was 20.65 ± 1.36 and the mean score of COVID-19 was 15.43 ± 16.14 (Table 1).

The comparison of the difficulties experienced by the students in clinical practice with the COVID 19 fear scale score is given in Table 2. In clinical practice, for students with a high fear of COVID-19; It was determined that they did not want to fulfill the practices of collecting data from the patient, performing invasive interventions on the patient, and caring for the patient ($p < 0.05$). It was determined that students with a high fear of COVID-19 did not want to go to the clinic because they were afraid of being away from their families if they caught COVID-19 in the hospital practice, and they were afraid of infecting the people with whom they shared the same place and being ostracized by these people ($p < 0.05$). Finally, students with high COVID-19 fear scale scores reported that the thought of going to the hospital during the COVID-19 period caused pain in their bodies ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Comparison of the difficulties experienced by students in clinical practice and the COVID-19 fear scale

		Yes Median [IQR]	No Median [IQR]	Test and p value
Students' attitudes towards patient care in clinical practice	In hospital practice, I do not want to collect data from the patient because of the fear that the patient may have COVID-19.	18 [13Q22]	13 [9Q16]	Z=-5.618 p<0.001
	During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to touch the patient in the hospital application.	17 [14Q21]	13 [9Q17]	Z=-5.001 p<0.001
	During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to spend a lot of time in hospital practice to support patients psychologically and socially.	17 [12.5Q22]	14 [11Q18]	Z=-3.141 p=0.002
	During the COVID-19 period, I do not want to do invasive procedures (such as injecting, and drawing blood) in hospital practice.	18 [14Q22]	14 [10Q18.5]	Z=-3.01 p=0.002
Findings on the students thoughts on the impact of their clinical practice on their social lives	If I catch COVID-19 in the hospital application during the COVID-19 period, I do not want to go to the hospital practices because I am afraid of being away from my family.	18 [14Q23]	14 [10Q17.25]	Z=-4.382 p<0.001
	I am afraid of the possibility of infecting people (family, friends, etc.) with whom they share the same place when returning to my living place at the end of the hospital application during the COVID-19 period.	18 [12.5Q22]	14 [1025Q18]	Z=-3.096 p=0.002
	I am afraid of being excluded from the place where I live (dormitory, apartment, etc.) because I went to the hospital during the COVID-19 period.	20 [12.75Q23.25]	14 [11Q18]	Z=-3.431 p=0.001
Students' thoughts on clinical practice	In the COVID-19 era, I would prefer the school application instead of the hospital application.	16,5 [13 Q21]	12 [7Q15]	Z=-5.257 p>0.001
Students' thoughts on clinical practice and pain	The thought of going to the hospital practice during the COVID-19 period causes pain in my body.	19 [14Q21.75]	14 [10 Q18]	Z=-3.46.2 p=0.001

IQR: 25th percentile, 75th percentile

Z: Mann-Whitney U

Table 1. Data on students' sociodemographic characteristics and covid-19 fear scores n=201

		n	%
Sex	Female	135	67.2
	Male	66	32.8
Class	2. years	77	38.3
	3. years	71	35.3
	4. years	53	26.4
Income rate	Income less than expenses	66	32.8
	Income equals expense	119	59.2
	Income more than expenses	16	8.0
University stay	Dormitory	182	90.5
	Home	8	4.0
	Homestay	11	5.5
Place of residence	Rural	35	17.4
	Town	109	54.2
	Province	57	28.4
Chronic disease status	Available	7	3.5
	Unavailable	194	96.5
A psychiatric illness for which medication is used	Available	3	1.5
	Unavailable	198	98.5
Smoking status	Yes	29	14.4
	No	172	85.6
Alcohol use status	Yes	12	6.0
	No	186	94.0
Age	20,65 ± 1,36 (min: 18, max:25)		
COVID-19 fear score	15,43 ± 16,14 (min: 7, max:35)		

Discussion

In this study, the attitudes of nursing students, who are the health personnel of the future, towards clinical practice during the pandemic period were examined. Our findings show that students' fears of COVID-19 negatively affect their desire for clinical practice. It has been found that students with high fear of COVID-19 have a lower desire for patient care in clinical practice. In this study, students' fears of COVID-19 were moderate. De Los Santos, Labrague, & Falguera (2021) reported that students' COVID-19 fear levels were moderate (14). In another similar study, Elsharkawy & Abdelaziz (2021) found university students to have a high level of fear of COVID-19 (15). It is stated that fear is an expected and justified emotion in a negative or unexpected situation (16,17). Moderate fears of nursing students who will practice in the hospital, which is a risky environment during the pandemic period; Considering the pandemic process, it can be interpreted as experiencing health anxiety as an expected and justified emotion. In addition, it is considered proof that nursing students take the global problem of the COVID-19 pandemic seriously.

In this study, the opinions of nursing students, who are health professionals of the future, about clinical

practice during the pandemic period; we presented the thoughts on patient care in the clinic, the impact of their clinical practice on their social lives, their views on clinical practice, and their views on experiencing pain.

Students' attitudes towards patient care in clinical practice;

In this study, it was found that students with a high level of fear of COVID-19 did not want to collect data from the patient, touch the patient, provide psychosocial support to the patient, and engage in invasive interventions. In terms of Aldwin's stress theory, such crises caused by natural or technological disasters, also called focal stressful events, emerge suddenly and threaten people's mental and/or physical integrity to a significant extent (18). Personal control over such situations is reported to be very weak (17). In this study, we think that students' avoidance of contact with patients in the clinical setting may be due to the possible change in personal control of students during the pandemic, which is a stressful situation. In addition, we can say that students avoid contact with the patient because they are afraid of contagion.

Findings on the students thoughts on the impact of their clinical practice on their social lives; Students with a high level of fear of COVID-19; It has been determined that he is afraid of infecting the people he lives with. In a qualitative study with nursing students, it is stated that students are afraid of transmitting COVID-19 to their families (17). In addition, it is stated that healthcare workers who are at the forefront of the COVID-19 epidemic are afraid of carrying diseases to their families and this is among the difficulties they experience (19). This study finding is similar to the literature found. These results make us think that nursing students may have had a fear of contracting the virus because they were in the hospital environment.

In this study, it was found that students with a high level of fear of COVID-19 were afraid of being excluded by the people they lived with due to their clinical practice. It has been reported that healthcare workers are exposed to stigma because of working with patients infected with COVID-19. Healthcare workers have been exposed to the most obvious forms of stigmatization as "disease carriers/spreaders" (20). We think that students are badly affected by this stigmatized news through social media. As a result, we think that students' fear of exclusion increases their COVID-19 fear levels.

Students' thoughts on clinical practice

In this study, students with high COVID-19 fear levels; It has been found that if COVID-19 is infected in practice, he does not want to go to the hospital practice because he is afraid of being away from their family and they want to practice at school. It has been reported that nursing students have a low level of fear

of COVID-19 in theoretical education, and higher fear of contracting COVID-19 in clinical education (17). In similar studies, it was found that students did not want to go to clinical training because they were afraid of contagion (21,22). This finding may be explained by students' thinking that COVID-19 is more likely to be transmitted from the hospital than from the school. Students' thoughts on clinical practice and their thoughts on experiencing pain

The COVID-19 fear level of the students who said that the thought of going to the hospital practice during the COVID-19 period causes pain in their body was found to be higher. In the study of Ciftci and Demir (2020), it was found that there was no difference between individuals' fear levels and perceived stress levels (23). In a study, it was determined that there is a positive relationship between increased stress levels and pain (24). Students think they are more likely to be infected with COVID-19 from the hospital. We think that these unpleasant feelings increase the stress of the students and cause pain.

Limitations

As it is a descriptive study, we cannot determine its causality. In a study with an online survey, duplicate entries could not be controlled. Students nursing reading motivations were not questioned. It has not been questioned whether they or their relatives have had COVID-19, whether they have relatives who died from COVID-19, whether they are anti-vaccine, etc.

Conclusion

It has been determined that there is a relationship between the fear of COVID-19 and the problems experienced by the students in the clinic. It was determined that the students avoided contact with the patient because they were afraid of contagion and they were afraid of transmitting the disease to their families. In addition, students reported that COVID-19 infection may be more contagious in the hospital, that they can be excluded from social life if they get COVID-19, and that their fears about COVID-19 cause pain to them. The result of the students' reluctance toward clinical applications is interesting. We recommend that studies be conducted on the methods that can be applied to reduce the fear of COVID-19 in nursing students, who will be at the forefront during the pandemic period. In addition, it is recommended to add theoretical and laboratory practice to the education processes so that students are ready for COVID-19 and similar pandemic processes.

Conflict of Interest: None

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