



The effect of nursing internship program on burnout and professional commitment



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ABSTRACT

Background: Professional commitment is defined as a belief in and acceptance of the values of the profession which is chosen, effort to actualize these values, desire to improve him/herself. Nurses' professional and organizational commitment are influenced by factors such as job stress, job satisfaction and burnout.

Objective: This study was conducted to determine the effect of nursing internship program on professional commitment and burnout of senior nursing students.

Design: A quasi-experimental study with a pretest and posttest without control group design was used.

Methods: Students who were attending nursing internship program and agreed to participate were included in the study. Sample consisted of 101 students. Data were collected with a questionnaire, the burnout measure short version and nursing professional commitment scale.

Results: After the nursing internship, 77.2% were pleased to study nursing, 83.2% were pleased to be a senior student, 55.4% did not have any intention to change their profession, 81.2% wanted to work as nurses, and 82.2% were planning career advancement in nursing of the students, 34.7% and 43.6% were found to experience burnout, before and after the nursing internship, respectively ($p < 0.05$). When the students' mean pre-test and post-test scores on the nursing professional commitment scale were compared, a significant difference was found between mean scores on the total score and "maintaining membership" subscale ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: This study revealed that after the nursing internship, burnout and professional commitment levels of the students increased.

1. Introduction

Professional commitment is defined as a belief in and acceptance of the values of the profession which is chosen, effort to actualize these values, desire to improve him/herself and determination to maintain membership in that profession (Benligiray and Sönmez, 2011). Nurses' professional and organizational commitment are influenced by factors such as job stress, job satisfaction and burnout (Derin and Demirel, 2012; Hoş and Oksay, 2015; Lu et al., 2007). Professional commitment is shaped by four factors during professional experience and socialization process. These are willingness to work, membership information (sustaining and protecting), believing in goals and values, and an ongoing career prospect (Çetinkaya et al., 2015).

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion, and a period which develops insidiously over time. It causes many serious problems such as workforce loss, domestic problems, psychosomatic disorders, substance abuse, insomnia, depression and other mental disorders (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout is especially common among

professionals who work by communicate and interact directly with people (Akyüz, 2015). This situation gains more importance for healthcare-related professions. Healthcare professionals constitute a group at the highest risk for burnout (Font et al., 2015; Yakut et al., 2013). Burnout, which has serious consequences such as causing workers to feel exhausted, to be unable to fulfill job requirements, and to run out of steam, adversely affects individual's motivation (Maslach et al., 2001).

2. Background

Although burnout is known as a problem related to professional life, today, it is also seen during student life (Kaya and Ariöz, 2014). The studies conducted with students, especially in the health field, present burnout among students (da Silva et al., 2014; Kaya and Ariöz, 2014; Tomaszewski-Barlem et al., 2014). Nursing education is a period which involves both theoretical and practical training. In this period, besides being in need to implement clinical practices, nursing students

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have traumatic experiences such as being responsible for a patient's care, encountering patients who are in pain or suffering or at terminal stage of an illness, and death (da Silva et al., 2014).

During undergraduate nursing education, students experience academic demands—tests, theoretical and practical course work, research activities, and aspects of professional practice, such as contact with health professionals and patients—as well as the practical matters of providing health services. Thus, students face situations related to their profession and academic development that may be assessed as stressors (da Silva et al., 2014). It is considered that stressors during nursing education will influence the professional commitment of students by leading to burnout. In a study by Lu et al. (2000), nursing students were found to have moderate-high levels of professional commitment before graduation. When the students find it difficult to adapt to their own situations amid the profession, or even when not satisfied with their career choice, sources of stress and conflict can be identified, with possible repercussions for the students in their own professional future, with the environment and working relationships with the different subjects they come to interact with, and to the care provided (Tomaschewski-Barlem et al., 2014). It is important to study burnout among nursing students because this condition has been found to be related to decreased academic performance, which can influence the quality of care in the nurses' professional life and expose patients to care-related risks (Galbraith and Brown, 2011).

Nursing internship program, which has recently been included in nursing curriculum in Turkey, is carried out two days a week for one semester or three days a week for two semesters, during the senior year. The goal of the nursing internship program is to gain competence in all cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills before the graduation. Purposes of the program are to provide opportunities for students to gain an understanding and competence in technical skills and procedures related to different practice environments; to practice basic nursing skills; to improve student's clinical decision making, communication, critical thinking and problem solving skills; to ensure the student's orientation to the professional life; to cooperate with health team members; to comply with professional ethics, principles and values and, to carry out professional practices in line with the relevant legislation (Hotun Şahin et al., 2016). The internship program aims to prepare students for the profession; however, students characterize it as “tiring” for its heavy schedule. This is why, the possibility that the program may lead to burnout among students, while they are still students, should be evaluated.

This study was conducted to determine the effect of nursing internship program on professional commitment and burnout status of senior nursing students.

2.1. Hypotheses of the Study

- 1) Nursing internship program has an effect on burnout.
- 2) Nursing internship program has an effect on professional commitment.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Design and Sample

This study was designed as a quasi-experimental study with a pretest and posttest without control group. Population of the study was composed of senior students studying at nursing department of a university ($N = 120$). Students who were attending nursing internship program and accepted to participate the study were included in the study. Sample consisted of 101 students. The rate of participation in the study was 84.2%.

3.2. Instruments

Data were collected with a questionnaire, the burnout measure short version and nursing professional commitment scale. The questionnaire involved 12 close ended questions to determine the students' socio-demographic features, such as age, gender, economic status, and their reasons for choosing nursing profession.

The Burnout Measure Short Version (BMS) was developed by Pines (2005) in order to meet the needs of researchers and practitioners with an easy to use instrument. The BMS was adapted to Turkish by Çapri et al. (2011). The BMS is a self-report instrument to measure occupational burnout levels of individuals. Items are scored on a “1 never” to “7 always” scale. A single total score is obtained from the BMS. Burnout levels of individuals are categorized as very low level, danger signs, burnout, serious signs and requiring immediate professional help.

Nursing Professional Commitment Scale (NPCS) was developed to determine professional commitment levels of nurses, by Lu et al. (2000). The scale has 26 items and three subscales (willingness to make an effort, maintaining membership, belief in goals and values). In this 4-point Likert-type scale, nine items (14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25th items) are negatively phrased, and are reverse scored. The lowest score on the scale is 26, while the highest score is 104. The lowest and highest scores in the subscales are as follows; 13–52 in “willingness to make an effort” subscale, 8–32 in “maintaining membership”, 5–20 in “belief in goals and values”. Higher scores obtained on subscales and on the entire scale indicate higher levels of professional commitment. The reliability and validity of Turkish version of the scale was evaluated by Çetinkaya et al. (2015), and Cronbach Alpha coefficient was found 0.90.

3.3. Nursing Internship Program

Nursing internship program consists of two courses with 3 h theoretical and 18 h practical training per week, for one academic year (fall and spring semesters) at fourth year of nursing education program. In this framework, students undergo training as internships in internal medicine, general surgery, gynecology, pediatric, psychiatric and public health clinics (15–20 days per clinic). The students took the care responsibility of the patients they care for under the nurse's supervision. Each student kept a record of their care plan and discussed the maintenance plan with the clinic responsible lecturer at least once a week. In addition, group discussions were conducted every week in each clinic. The skills that were missing from the previous clinic of the students were completed in the new clinic. The nursing internship began one month before the academic year and finished at the end of the year (32 weeks in total).

3.4. Data Collection

The study was conducted during 2015–2016 academic year between August 2015 and June 2016. Before the nursing internship, students are informed about the purpose and process of the nursing internship. The students were informed about the study process before data collection. After reading the contents of the consent form, questionnaire, the burnout measure short version and nursing professional commitment scale were given in a sealed envelope to those accepting to participate in the study. These participants voluntarily consented and were told they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. They fulfilled the data collection instruments, then they put the envelopes into the boxes prepared by the researchers. It took approximately 15–20 min to administer the data collection tools. After one week of the internship program, the instruments were re-administered to the students.

3.5. Ethical Consideration

Before the study, ethics committee approval from ethics committee, and written permissions from faculty of health sciences were obtained. Oral and written consents of the students, who participated in the study, were obtained after reading an informed consent.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with using SPSS 15.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Chicago, Illinois). Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Categorical comparisons were performed by the chi-square. Continuous variables were expressed as mean and standard deviation (SD). Paired sample *t*-test was used to compare the difference between pre and post test scores of students at each group. A two-sided *p* value 0.05 was considered significant for all analyses.

4. Results

Among the students, 87.1% were females, 12.9% were males; 73.3% and 22.8% had moderate and good economic status, respectively; 85.1% had no chronic disease. The students reported several reasons why they chose nursing profession; 60.4% chose the profession voluntarily, 88.1% for jobs in nursing were easy to find, 53.5% for desire to help people, 36.6% for a good salary, 32.7% for the will of their family, 26.7% for recommendations, 25.7% for loving profession.

Before the nursing internship, 73.3% of the students were found to be pleased to study nursing, 75.2% were pleased to be a senior student, 56.4% did not have any intention to change their profession, 75.2% wanted to work as nurses, 39.6% wanted to work as nurse academicians, and 78.2% were planning career advancement in nursing. After the nursing internship, the rates were found to change as follows; 77.2% were pleased to study nursing, 83.2% were pleased to be a senior student, 55.4% did not have any intention to change their profession, 81.2% wanted to work as nurses, 43.6% wanted to work as nurse academicians, and 82.2% were planning career advancement in nursing (Table 1).

When burnout levels of the students were analyzed, 34.7% and 43.6% were found to experience burnout, before and after the nursing internship, respectively ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2).

When the students' mean pre-test and post-test scores on the NPCS were compared, a significant difference was found between mean scores on the total score and "maintaining membership" subscale ($p < 0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 1
Opinions related to studying nursing and graduation.

Opinions	Before the nursing internship		After the nursing internship		<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Pleased to study nursing					
Yes	74	73.3	78	77.2	0.481
No	27	26.7	23	22.8	
Desire to work as a nurse after graduation					
Willing	76	75.2	82	81.2	0.238
Unwilling	25	24.8	19	18.8	
Career plan					
Advancing in nursing career	79	78.2	83	82.2	0.737
Changing the career	11	10.9	10	9.9	
Studying another department	11	10.9	8	7.9	

Table 2
Burnout levels of the students (*N* = 101).

Burnout level	Before the nursing internship		After the nursing internship		<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Very low	32	31.7	21	20.8	0.022
Danger signs	24	23.8	28	27.7	
Burnout	35	34.7	44	43.6	
Serious signs	9	8.9	3	3.0	
Requiring help	1	1.0	5	5.0	

Table 3
Mean scores of the students' taken from nursing professional commitment scale (*N* = 101).

Nursing professional commitment scale	Before the nursing internship	After the nursing internship	<i>p</i>
Willingness to make an effort	26.4 ± 6.8	27.1 ± 6.3	0.191
Maintaining membership	15.8 ± 4.7	16.8 ± 4.6	0.032
Belief in goals and values	14.1 ± 1.8	14.3 ± 1.4	0.349
Total score	56.3 ± 10.1	58.1 ± 9.5	0.023

5. Discussion

Clinical practice as well as theoretical knowledge is an important component of nursing education (*National Nursing Training Program, 2014*). During clinical practice, many situations such as entering in a new environment, encountering a difficult patient, traumatic experiences, fear of making a mistake, or knowing that you are being evaluated by instructors, may lead to burnout by causing heavy stress on students. The features of burnout among students are as follows: emotional exhaustion, which is characterized by feelings of exhaustion owing to study requirements; cynicism, which entails a cynical, detached attitude toward study; and professional inefficacy, which is marked by the perception of oneself as incompetent (*da Silva et al., 2014; Rudman and Gustavsson, 2012; Tomaschewski-Barlem et al., 2014*). In this study, about half of the students were found to experience some level of burnout, before and after the nursing internship. This finding shows that the hypothesis that "Nursing internship program has an effect on burnout" was accepted. Similarly, *Rudman and Gustavsson (2012)* found an increase in burnout levels of nursing students, across the years in education. *Watson et al. (2008)* also inferred in their study that nursing education caused an increase in stress and burnout levels. In another study with nursing and midwifery students in Turkey, it was reported that emotional exhaustion levels of nursing students increased as the class year increased (*Kaya and Ariöz, 2014*). In the environment of training for majoring in nursing, several factors may become stressors, commonly developed in full time courses, with a constantly intense pace, the pressure arising from the requirements of professors and anxiety about having a satisfactory performance in each class (*Tomaschewski-Barlem et al., 2014*). It is widely held view that nursing students experience burnout due to reasons such as long studying hours during the first three years of nursing training, insufficient spare time, communicational problems with patients and distrust related to clinical competence; and the nursing internship increases this heavy load, mainly in clinical practice.

Clinical practice has always been the major component of nursing training. During clinical practice, nursing students are expected to have competence in skills, knowledge, attitudes and values specific to nursing profession (*Chan, 2002*). This competence, positively influences self-confidence and professional perception of the students. According to the results of this study, after the nursing internship, the students' professional commitment as well as maintaining membership subscale

scores increased significantly. These findings reveal that the hypothesis that “Nursing internship program has an effect on professional commitment” was accepted. The increase in professional commitment of the students may be explained by the fact that the nursing internship may have caused the students to perceive themselves more competent because it contributed to the development of their knowledge and skills. This can also be evaluated as a positive effect of the nursing internship. Tural Büyük et al. (2014) found that nursing internship increases knowledge and skills and promotes the self-confidence and communication skills of students. To the question what contributions internship make for students, 59.9% of nurses stated that it boosts clinic knowledge and skills of students, 62.8% stated that it increases the self-confidence of students and 56.2% said that it develops communication skills of students. It has been observed that internship increases the quality of nursing care (50.4%), does not restrict nurses' time allocated to patient (82.5%), does not increase work load (74.5%) and increase the job satisfaction of nurses (59.1%). In present study, after the nursing internship, the number of students, who were pleased with the nursing profession and wanted to work as nurses after graduation, increased, although not significantly. Also, there was a significant difference was found between mean scores of maintaining membership subscale. Maintaining membership measures the degree to which employees feel that they should remain in their current jobs (Hsu et al., 2015). These result shows that the nursing internship enhances the professional commitment of the students and that students might be more idealistic and feel ready for profession and, willing to work as a nurse after graduation. Belief in goals and values measures the extent to which individuals had strong beliefs in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values. Willingness to make an effort describes the extent to which individuals are willing to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Hsu et al., 2015). In present study, nursing internship program did not affect “willingness to make an effort” and “belief in goals and values”. This finding may be due to the fact that the students do not feel as a member of institution they are currently in because they will be work in different institutions after graduation.

The strengths and limitations of the study are following. Nursing internship program is conducted only in some nursing education programs, in Turkey. Any internship program similar to this program (Gazi University Information Package, <http://gbp.gazi.edu.tr>) could not found in international literature. So that, this is the first study investigating the effect of nursing internship on professional commitment and burnout status of senior nursing students.

There are limitations for this study. The study was conducted in only one university and cannot be generalized to all universities. Because this study was conducted based on volunteer participation, only students willing to participate completed the questionnaire. The another limitation is the lack of control group.

6. Conclusion

In recent years, based on the influence of the Bologna Process and Turkey Higher Education Proficiency Framework studies, adequate education approach has been adopted (*National Nursing Training Program*, 2014). This approach has led to the widespread use of internships in the nursing education programs of universities, in Turkey. Internship program provides an increase in the professional capabilities of the students, supports the students in feeling themselves more sufficient and ready for their job with a higher self-esteem (Tosun et al., 2008). This study revealed that after the nursing internship, burnout and professional commitment levels of the students increased. For this reason, it is recommended that dissemination of the internship program in nursing education. In addition, factors leading to experience of burnout during clinical practice course in the last year of nursing education should be investigated, and the course should be revised and

reorganized in order to prevent burnout.

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