

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Study on the Views of Nursing Students in the First Year and Fourth Year on Social Gender Equality

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Abstract

Objective: This study was conducted to evaluate the perspective of nursing school students toward gender equality in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Method: The study was conducted as a descriptive and seeking relationship between variables research. The research sample consisted of first- and fourth-grade students enrolled in the nursing department of a foundation university in the fall/summer semester of the 2015–2016 academic year. A simple randomized sampling method was used in the study, and 124 students out of the study population of 175 were selected. Sociodemographic variables questionnaire and Gender Equality Scale were used as data collection tools.

Results: The data were evaluated using mean, minimum and maximum values, percentage distribution, t-test, analysis of variance, post hoc Tukey test, and standard deviation tests. The mean score was 39.12 for traditional gender norms, 9.50 for social equality norms, and 48.62 for Gender Equality Scale. It was determined that the egalitarian gender norms of female students were statistically significant ($p < .05$) compared with the male students. In addition, it was determined that egalitarian gender norms in senior students were statistically significant ($p < .05$) compared with the first-year students.

Conclusion: On the basis of the findings, the study makes some recommendations to encourage positive behavior and attitude in teenage students toward egalitarian gender roles. Participation of women in training programs, social activities, and courses about social gender equality or about other subjects in or outside the school should be supported.

Keywords: Gender, gender equality, femininity, sex role, gender role

Introduction

According to the first article of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), gender equality is defined as “recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (CEDAW, 1979). This convention acknowledges discrimination against women. It is also designed to eliminate this existing inequality and discrimination (Arslan, 2004). Social gender inequality, which has been going on since the ancient times, can only be eradicated with a positive discrimination for women (Çiçek & Yeşilbursa, 2019).

According to the 2011 census of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), 47.4% of the population is women.

In October 2016, 36.2% of the workforce (42.897 people) in TRNC was women. There are 2.7-fold more women who are illiterate than men who are illiterate. In the country, women unemployment rate is 7.9% (TRNC State Planning Organization, 2011/2017). The percentage of women in the workforce was 36.6% in the same year. Although the percentage of women in the workforce has increased to 37.9% at present, unemployment rate for women has also increased to 12.2% (TRNC Statistics Institute, 2017/2020). Having more women in the workforce and a higher employment rate for women allow women to be socially, culturally, and economically stronger; this also contributes to solutions for women’s socioeconomic problems (İçli, 2018). The parliament of the TRNC adopted founding purposes of the Women’s Studies Department on February 26, 2002. Later, this was revised and enacted as the Law for Social Gender Equality Department on November 17, 2014 (Law on Founding, Duties, and Work-

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ing Principles of the Social Gender Equality, 2014). Although necessary legal basis was available, the department could only be opened 4 years later, in the last days of 2018. It would not be wrong to say that there is a gender inequality in the TRNC, as observed when the historical process is examined and the delay in legal regulations is taken into consideration (Aliefendioğlu, 2007; Necipoğlu et al., 2021).

Nursing can be described as an occupation that tops the list of occupations that are mostly associated with women by the public and where social gender roles are most strictly used and gender-based discrimination is very common (Kandiyoti, 2013). While experiencing these problems, nurses also have to struggle with gender inequalities in society. Similar to many countries, in the TRNC, nursing is at the top of the list of professions that are mostly associated with women. Nurses can only understand possible gender inequalities in the society they serve by learning about the roles and duties of women in that culture. The role of nurses in counseling and guidance is very important for women to benefit equally from health, education, workforce, and education. It should be noted that only a healthy woman can have a healthy family (Necipoğlu et al., 2021; Özden & Gölbaşı, 2018). When studies that investigate nursing students and their views on social genders and social gender equality were reviewed, it was found that the mean score of nursing students in equal gender role was 37 and the median score in female roles was 24, which showed that they had an egalitarian approach (Zeyneloğlu, 2008). In a study conducted by Kavuran (2011), the mean score of female nursing students for gender equality was 59.93, whereas it was 54.72 for male students. In a study by Atış (2010), the mean score of first year nursing/midwifery students in the Social Gender Roles Attitude Scale was 148.28, whereas the mean score of fourth year nursing/midwifery students was higher at 157.14. Nurses need to have an egalitarian approach toward gender roles in the society. By having an egalitarian approach, nurses will set a good example for the patients they provide care to have an egalitarian view. Furthermore, an egalitarian social structure can be useful in empowering and advancing nurses and nursing profession (Zeyneloğlu, 2008). In their study, Can et al. (2018) found that nursing students had a high level of positive attitude toward gender equality. According to the study by Yanikkerem et al. (2020), when students who had courses on social gender equality in the school were compared with those who did not, those who did not have any education on social gender equality were found to be more insensitive.

Although there are studies on gender in the literature, there are not enough studies on the subjects in our country. This

study is believed to create awareness about social gender issue and contribute to the already existing literature (Aliefendioğlu, 2007; Necipoğlu et al., 2021).

This study was conducted to understand the views on gender equality of the students, with different sociodemographics and any related variables, who were in the first and fourth year in the nursing department of a private university in Northern Cyprus. The questions of research are that "Is there a difference between the students who are in the first and fourth year in the nursing department of a private University in TRNC in terms of gender equality scale scores?" and "Is there a relationship between the students who are in the first and fourth year in the nursing department of a private university in TRNC in terms of gender equality scale score and their introductory characteristics?"

Material and Methods

Study Design

This is a descriptive and correlational study.

Setting Sample and Population for the Study

The study population consisted of 120 students studying in the first year and 55 students in the fourth year, which makes a total of 175 students in the Department of Nursing of a private university in the TRNC in 2015–2016 academic year. That using the sampling methods 96% confidence interval and 5% sampling error were calculated for 124 students out of 175 students.

The details of the calculation of the sample size are given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N * t^2 * p * q}{(N - 1)d^2 + t^2 * p * q} \quad n = \frac{175 * (1.96)^2 * 0.50 * 0.50}{(174)(0.05)^2 + (1.96)^2 * 0.50 * 0.50} = 124$$

Measurement Tools

Data were collected between April 19 and April 26, 2016 using a questionnaire form. The questionnaire form used as the data collection tool consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire included the Sociodemographic Variables Questionnaire prepared according to the literature (Çeber et al., 2009; Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007; Yanikkerem et al., 2020) The questionnaire included questions about sociodemographics of students, such as age, gender, marital status, citizenship, high school type, number of siblings, education of parents as well as questions to find out romantic and sexual relationships with the opposite gender violent behavior, and exposure to violence. The second part of the questionnaire included Gender Equality Scale, which was developed by Pulerwitz and Barker (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Çeber et al. (2009). The scale consisted of 24 items about violence toward sexual partner, sharing of responsibilities to prevent diseases and for reproductive health, and gender roles in sexual relationships and childcare. The scale had two subdimensions: the traditional gender norms subdimension had 17 items, and the egalitarian gender norms subdimension had 7 items. This is a three-point Likert scale and questions are answered either with "I agree", "I somewhat agree," or

Main Points

- The nursing students who participated in the study had high level of support for egalitarian gender norms.
- The nursing students in the fourth year had more equitable gender norms than the students in the first year.
- The male students had a traditional attitude toward social gender equality.

"I do not agree". The lowest score for each item is one, and the highest score is three. Accordingly, the higher the score in the test with a score range from 1 to 72, the better the student's attitude toward reproductive health. Higher scores in the scale refer to higher support for gender equality norms. The minimum score is 7 and maximum score is 21 for egalitarian gender norms subdimension, and the minimum score is 17 and maximum score is 51 for traditional gender norms subdimension. Total score in the scale is classified as low, moderate, and high: a score of 1–23 indicates low support for gender equality, a score of 24–47 indicates moderate support for gender equality, and a score of 48–72 indicates high support for gender equality (Çeber et al., 2009; Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008). According to the internal consistency analysis carried out by Çeber et al., Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient is 0.78 for the whole scale for 356 participants. Internal consistency coefficient is 0.79 for the traditional gender norms subdimension and 0.69 for the egalitarian gender norms subdimension. In addition, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated for the study results by the researchers, and the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated to be 0.83 for the overall scale. Internal consistency coefficient is 0.88 for the traditional gender norms subdimension and 0.69 for the egalitarian gender norms subdimension (Çeber et al., 2009). In the original study, internal consistency reliability of the two factors was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha. The two factors, inequitable gender norms and equitable gender norms, achieved alphas of 0.85 and 0.77, respectively (Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

Approval to use the questionnaire was obtained from the ethics committee (approval number and date: 07.03/16,

29/03/2016), and institutional approval was obtained from the Head of the Department of Nursing of the Girne American University. Informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Data Analysis

Data obtained with the questionnaire form used as a data collection tool in the study was analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program version 22.0 (IBM SPSS Corp.; Armonk, NY, USA). Study data were analyzed using mean, minimum and maximum values, percentage distribution, t-test, analysis of variance, post hoc Tukey test, and standard deviation tests. In order to identify the hypothesis tests to be used to compare scale scores according to the demographics of the students, normal distribution of scale scores was tested with Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Furthermore, Q-Q plot and skewness-kurtosis values of the scale scores were also assessed.

Results

In this study, 31.45% of the students were aged between 18 and 19 years, 24.19% were aged between 20 and 21 years, 27.42% were aged between 22 and 23 years, and 16.94% were aged 24 years and more. In this study, 51.65% of the students were females and 44.35% were males, and all of the participating students were single (100%). Of the students, 83.06% were citizens of the Republic of Turkey, 7.26% were citizens of the Northern Cyprus, and 8.06% were citizens of both the Republic of Turkey and Northern Cyprus (other citizens 1.61%). In the study, 38.71% of the students were living in dormitories, and 61.29% were living in rent or owned accommodations. Of the students, 29.84% had one sibling, 27.42% had two siblings, 36.29% had three or more siblings, and

Table 1
The Traditional Gender Norms Subdimension Response Distribution (n = 124)

Traditional gender norms subdimension	I agree		I somewhat agree		I do not agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1- Men decide about the type of sex	32	25.81	21	16.94	71	57.26
2- The most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and cook for the family	25	20.16	52	41.94	47	37.90
3- Men need sex more than women do	40	32.26	31	25.00	53	42.74
4- Don't talk about sex, just do it	20	16.13	30	24.19	74	59.68
5- It is easier for women to carry condoms with them	33	26.61	34	27.42	57	45.97
6- Changing diapers, giving baths and feeding kids are all mother's responsibility	34	27.42	43	34.68	47	37.90
7- It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant	19	15.32	38	30.65	67	54.03
8- Man should have the final word about decisions at home	32	25.81	29	23.39	63	50.81
9- Men are always ready for sex	42	33.87	37	29.84	45	36.29
10- There are times when a woman deserves a beating	20	16.13	18	14.52	86	69.35
11- A man needs other women even if his wife is beautiful	25	20.16	16	12.90	83	66.94
12- If someone insults me, I will defend my reputation, with force if I have to	45	36.29	37	29.84	42	33.87
13- A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together	18	14.52	28	22.58	78	62.90
14- If my wife asks me to use condom during sex, I will be outraged	10	8.06	25	20.16	89	71.77
15- A man can beat his wife if she does not want to have sex	10	8.06	15	12.10	99	79.84
16- I would never have a gay friend	40	32.26	19	15.32	65	52.42
17- I hate it when I see a man with effeminate behaviour	45	36.29	20	16.13	59	47.58

Table 2
Distribution of the Answers of the Students in the Social Equality Norms Subdimension (n = 124)

Social equality norms subdimension	I agree		I somewhat agree		I do not agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
18- Couples should decide together if they want to have children.	106	85.48	11	8.87	7	5.65
19- I think women can also ask men to use condoms.	74	59.68	33	26.61	17	13.71
20 If a man gets a woman pregnant, the child is the responsibility of both of them.	106	85.48	8	6.45	10	8.06
21- A man should know what his partner likes during sex.	98	79.03	19	15.32	7	5.65
22- Although not as much as the mother, the participation of the father is important in raising children.	95	76.61	20	16.13	9	7.26
23- A man and woman should decide together what type of contraceptive to use.	88	70.97	19	15.32	17	13.71
24- It's important for men to have male friends to talk about their problems.	76	61.29	30	24.19	18	14.52

Table 3
Distribution of Scores of Students in the Gender Equality Scale and Its Subdimensions

Gender Equality Scale	n	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Traditional gender norms	124	39.12	8.25	19	51
Social equality norms	124	9.50	3.31	7	21
Overall scale	124	48.62	8.11	27	68

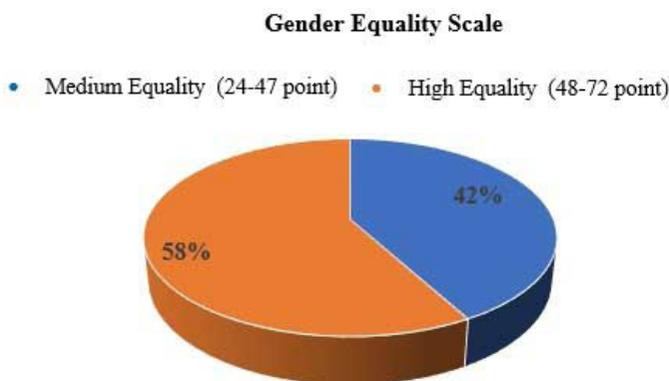


Figure 1. Distribution of Scores of Students in the Gender Equality Scale

6.45% were the only child. 66.13% of the students had a nuclear family, 28.23% had a large family, and 5.65% of parents of the students were divorced/separated. Of the students, 50% graduated from regular high schools, 26% from super high schools/science high schools/Anatolian high schools, and 24% graduated from vocational high schools or technical high schools.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the answers of the students in the traditional gender norms subdimension. Majority of the students chose "I do not agree" to the following statements: "Do not talk about sex, just do it," "There are times when a woman deserves a beating," "A man needs other women even if his wife is beautiful," "A woman should toler-

ate violence in order to keep her family together," "If my wife wants me to use condom during sex, I will be outraged," and "A man can beat his wife, if she does not want to have sex."

As described in Table 2, majority of the students gave "I agree" answer to the following statements: "Couples should decide together if they want to have children," "If a man get a woman pregnant, the child is the responsibility of both of them," "A man should know what his partner likes during sex," "Although not as much as the mother, the father is important in raising children," and "A man and woman should together decide what type of contraceptive to use."

Table 3 includes the total average scores of the students included in the study in the overall equality scale and traditional gender norms and social equality norms subdimensions of the Gender Equality Scale. The mean score of the students in the traditional gender norms subdimension was 39.12 ± 8.25 ; the lowest score of the students in this subdimension was 19, and the highest score was 51. The mean score of the students in the social equality norms subdimension in the Gender Equality Scale was 9.50 ± 3.31 ; the lowest score was 7 and the highest was 21 in this subdimension. The mean score of the students in the Gender Equality Scale was 48.62 ± 8.11 . The lowest score for the students was 27 and the highest was 68.

As seen in the Figure 1, according to the Gender Equality Scale, 58% of the students had scores in the range of 48-72 and 42% had scores in the range of 24-47.

The mean score of female students was 52.29 ± 6.06 and the mean score of male students was 44.02 ± 8.06 in the Gender Equality Scale. A significant difference was found between the scores of the female and male students in the overall scale ($p < .05$). Female students had higher scores than male students in the Gender Equality Scale. The mean score of the

first-year students was 46.81 ± 7.93 , whereas the mean score of the fourth-year students was 52.29 ± 7.28 in the Gender Equality Scale. A significant difference was found between the scores of the first- and fourth-year students in the overall scale ($p < .05$). The students in the fourth year had statistically significantly higher scores than the students in the first year of the university ($p < .05$). The mean score of the students who participated in the study and showed violent behavior toward the opposite gender was 45.28 ± 8.96 and the mean score of those who did not was 49.46 ± 7.71 . A significant difference was found between the scores of the students who showed violent behavior toward the opposite gender and the students who did not in the overall scale ($p < .05$). The students in the study who showed violent behavior toward the opposite gender had lower scores than those who did not. The mean score of the students who were involved in a relationship was 47.16 ± 7.71 , whereas the mean score of the students who were not was 51.02 ± 8.28 in the Gender Equality Scale. A statistically significant difference was found between the scores of the students who were involved in a relationship and the students who were not ($p < .05$).

The effect of sociodemographics of the students, including age, place of residence, high school, accommodation type, number of siblings, family type, education level of parents, exposure to violence from the opposite gender, and gender preference in children, was found to have no statistical significance ($p > .05$).

Discussion

The mean score of the students was 39.12 ± 8.25 in the traditional gender norms subdimension, 9.50 ± 3.31 in the social equality norms subdimension, and 48.62 ± 8.11 in the overall Gender Equality Scale in the study. The students who participated in the study had "high level" of support for egalitarian gender norms. The findings from the studies by Atış (2010), Can et al. (2018), Çiçek and Yeşilbursa (2019), Kavuran (2011), Özcan (2012), Yanikkerim et al. (2020), and Zeyneloğlu (2008) were similar to the findings of this study with regard to egalitarian norms, roles, and attitudes of students. However, in the study by Atış (2010), the study sample consisted of only female students, and as it is generally known that women adopt egalitarian gender roles in the society, this could be the reason why the study found high level support for egalitarian gender norms. This result can be interpreted as the reflection of egalitarian roles and attitudes that the students acquired through university education.

In contrast to the findings of this study, Çelik et al. (2013) found that students had moderate level support for gender equality norms. However, in the study, the mean score of the students in the Department of Health Sciences was 46.86 ± 6.79 , which was higher than the mean scores of students in other departments, and although the difference was statistically significant, it is a striking finding that they had moderate level support for egalitarian gender attitude. In general, students studying health/health sciences are expected to have more egalitarian gender norms than students in oth-

er departments. Health-related courses or course contents may help to encourage students to assume positive attitudes toward gender equality and gender roles. In addition, women are known to have more egalitarian gender norms. Students who study health-related subjects are mostly women, and this might be the reason why studies mostly find more egalitarian results. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that students are influenced by the gender roles of the culture they were brought up in, and most students included in the study were those who just started university and who were mostly from patriarchal families with traditional gender roles.

A study conducted by Beidoğlu and Batman (2014) with third year and fourth year students showed results different from our study, and it was found that they had both traditional roles and an egalitarian role in terms of their views on gender roles.

Many studies found that female students support more egalitarian gender norms than male students. In some studies conducted to determine views of teenage university students on social gender equality and roles, male students had more traditional gender norms and female students had more egalitarian gender norms, similar to the findings of this study (Can et al., 2018; Çelik et al., 2013; Çetinkaya, 2013; Kabasakal & Girli, 2012; Kavuran, 2011; Önder et al., 2013; Öngen & Aytac, 2013; Özcan, 2012; Özden & Gölbaşı, 2018; Vefikuluçay et al., 2007; Yanikkerim et al., 2020). Our study found that male students have a traditional attitude toward social gender equality. The main reason for this is the roles of men defined by the society. In other words, the society expects men to behave according to the traditional gender stereotypes (Vefikuluçay et al., 2007).

In the study, students who were in the fourth year had more egalitarian gender norms than those who were in the first year of the university. In the study by Atış (2010), it was found that midwifery and nursing students in the fourth year supported traditional gender norms more than the students in the first year. In contrast to the above findings, no significant difference was found between the first year and fourth year students in the study conducted by Önder et al. (2013). In addition, it is possible to say that students in the first year have more traditional gender norms than the students in the fourth year. This study is comparable to our study in this regard. Fourth year students had higher scores in the overall Gender Equality Scale and in its subdimensions, which could be the result of the courses and education they had in the university. The reason for lower scores of the first-year students in the scale can be that they were influenced by their families and pre-university friends or reflected their thoughts.

Contrary to the findings of our study, Kavuran (2011) found that the order of overall mean scores in the Gender Equality Scale was third year, second year, first year, and fourth year students. The mean score of the first-year students was higher than the mean score of the fourth-year students, and the difference was statistically significant ($p < .05$). The rea-

son for this could be the homogeneity of the cultures and community of the students included in the study.

In the study, students who did not show violent behavior toward the opposite gender had more egalitarian gender norms than the students who did. Çetinkaya (2013) found that as tendency for violence increased, traditional attitude toward gender roles also increased. This finding in the Çetinkaya's study (2013) supports the findings of our study.

In the study, students who were not in a romantic relationship had more egalitarian gender norms than the students who were. Students who were not involved in a relationship had higher scores in the Gender Equality Scale than those who were, which could mean that inequalities in a relationship can cause stress and increase dissatisfaction in the relationship. Emotional bonds/relationships women have with the opposite gender can also cause women to miss good opportunities and their decision-making processes are negatively affected (Illouz, 2013).

In the study, students who had a sex life had more egalitarian gender norms than the students who did not. The study by Kavuran (2011) reported that the mean score of students in the Gender Equality Scale who did not have sexual experience was higher than the students who had. Kavuran's (2011) study is comparable to our study in this regard. The biggest reason for this could be that romantic or sexual experiences have no effect on emotional attachment or better understanding of the opposite gender (Illouz, 2013).

Although the effect of education of parents and number of siblings on the students was not statistically significant, Can et al. (2018) found that when the education level of the parents of the students decreased and the number of siblings increased, students' attitudes towards social gender roles were negatively affected.

Limitations of the Research

The study population is limited to the first- and fourth-year students in the Department of Nursing in a university in Northern Cyprus.

Suggestions

Further studies with large samples to have a better and more comprehensive profile about the views of university students in Northern Cyprus on gender equality are recommended. Concepts about social genders are taught separately in different courses in nursing programs. Instead, a course, such as Nursing and Social Genders, can be added in the nursing curriculum. This course should especially be included in the first term of the first year. In addition, orientation programs for new students with the help of other students should be planned. Participation of women in training programs, social activities, and courses about social gender equality or about other subjects in or outside the school should be supported; however, participation of men should be especially encouraged because men play an important role in promoting egalitarian socialization.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval (07.03/16, 29/03/2016) for this study was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee in Girne American University Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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