

The Public Image of Nursing and the Social Perceptions of Nurses Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic. An Integrated Review

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Abstract

Background: The nursing profession has struggled with its public perception as the image of nurses has been shaped by myths and stereotypes of selfless, hardworking and compassionate women helpers. This distorted image of nursing being a feminine profession subordinated to the medical profession without its own scientific field was perpetuated by the media with direct consequences on the self-image, social status and professional satisfaction of nurses. However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the crucial and indispensable role of nurses in times of crisis and disasters as nurses spearheaded the war against this pandemic.

Objective: In this integrative review we aim to shed light to potential shifts in the public or social image of nurses five years before the COVID-19 outbreak and one year after WHO announced that COVID-19 was no longer listed as an international public health emergency. We also aim to investigate any changes in the public's understanding of nursing work and how the mass media projection of the profession during the pandemic has affected the social status and image of nurses. As nurses themselves may also try to fit into the expected stereotyped role, our review also examines changes in the self-image of nurses due to the pandemic.

Methods: This comprehensive review followed the methodological framework developed by (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) which includes the following five steps: i) identification of the research problem; ii) planning a search strategy and literature search. iii) data evaluation. iv) critical analysis of selected data and synthesis; v) presentation of selected data.

Results: According to the findings of this integrative review, the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly caused a more positive shift in the public image of nursing by making the reality of this profession more visible to the public on a global basis.

Conclusions: It is important that the findings of the present review inform policy makers and educators about key sources that affect the image of nursing globally and be used for further research and design of rigorous strategies to help improve the image of nursing and thus the self-image of nurses and the working conditions.

Keywords: nursing; public image; social image; social perception; social representation

Introduction

Our image of nursing is deeply influenced by the reforms effectuated by Florence Nightingale who strived to ameliorate not only the effectiveness of the nursing profession but also the notions of it before it became a profession. Nightingale aimed for the nursing profession to be socially and publicly viewed as a profession for decent women and alter its image of being a low-valued occupation predominately for females who were mostly looked upon as poor, low status care givers for the sick in pesthouses and poorhouses (Frechette & Carnevale, 2020 ; McDonald, 2010). These deeply rooted notions of the nursing profession, before it even became a profession, still influence

it today through myths and stereotyping (Jinks & Bradley, 2004). Stereotypes, as gross overgeneralizing simplifications leave very little room for different perceptions and/or beliefs and contribute to the standardization of negative viewpoints and images. According to the traditional nursing stereotypes O'Dowd (1998) and Jinks (2004) categorized them into four themes: a) "the doctor's handmaiden", 2) "the ministering angel", 3) the "battleaxe", and 4) "the naughty nurse". The media portrayal of nurses as angels, handmaidens, sex objects and "sisters" of mercy in tight sexy uniforms functioning as servants to male doctors (Brook and Crouch, 2004) perpetuated the nursing stereotypes and the relevant gender considerations,

since care was understood as an activity inherent to women and job power and influence were based on gender (Jinks & Bradley, 2004). As the media was and still is the most powerful influence on the image of nurses (Donelan et al., 2008) the above were all important variables in the development of the image of nurses further shaping a distorted public image of the nursing profession and passing it on to the next generations (O'Dowd, 1998; Jinks and Bradley, 2004).

As the public image of nurses and the nursing profession encloses cultural collective beliefs and perceptions, stereotypes and myths (Morris-Thompson et al., 2011) it can be deduced that changes in the sociocultural society setting ultimately lead to changes in the nursing profession and the social or public image of nurses. While in the late 90's the study of Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1998) indicated that young people still considered nursing a little valued profession and a low status job not eligible for a career choice, the constant technological developments in the field of healthcare, global crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increased access to various sources of information (e.g. social networks, communication), are examples of changes which have augmented the visibility of the nursing profession and contributed to a shift in the public perception. According to Taghinezhad et al., (2020) and Zamanzadeh et al., (2022) disasters such as the global coronavirus pandemic, are unique opportunities for the nursing profession to have its values and position recognized by the public. The rapid spread of the coronavirus infection which started in China at the end of December 2019 and was declared a pandemic by the WHO in March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2022), was an opportunity for the society to become aware of the importance and the indispensable role of nurses. The fundamental role of nurses in the global health crisis as an essential component in the management and combat of the COVID-19 pandemic favored the search for more information and a deeper knowledge about the nursing profession. At the forefront of the pandemic, nurses constituted the largest number of health care personnel who took pride in responding to all emergencies thus gaining greater recognition due to their dedicated efforts (Lotfi et al., 2021; Padilha et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the public viewed the nursing profession through the lens of deeply rooted stereotypes and myths exemplifying it as a gendered and low status occupation (Kelly et al., 2012, Jinks & Bradley, 2004; Kalisch & Kalisch, 1987). The public's trust in the nursing profession was ingrained in traditional stereotypes of selfless hardworking females (Girvan et al., 2016) rather than the concept of autonomous, not solely effeminate and well-educated nursing professionals. Even though the study of Payne (2000) and (Jinks & Bradley 2004) showed that as time progresses student nurses as well as the general public believes that the nursing stereotypes are changing and nurses are being looked upon as well-educated, autonomous and hard-working professionals, it was during the challenging conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic when the importance and strength of nursing and the reality behind the work of nurses was highlighted (Bennett et al., 2020). The sexist

roles of nurses, the devalued activities performed by male and female nurses and the marginalization of the profession (Banon et al., 2004 ; Ramos et al., 2010) were strongly questioned by society as the media exposed the role of nurses as performing indispensable work and being the closest people to patients when everyone else was practicing safe distance. According to (Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012) the public image of nursing is influenced by the nurses' self-image, the media, mass communication tools, stereotypes, the public perception of nursing, and the nurses' perception of their public image, with the mass media being the most influential source for defining and presenting the images that the public has (Bennett et al., 2020). As media portrayals influence the perception of the audience (Heilemann, 2012; Hart, 2013; Summers and Summers 2015), the countless caring nurses' stories overwhelming the social media and the images of nurses as heroes, which the audience instantly understands (Lippmann, 1956) contribute to society accepting these new portrayals as an accurate depiction, even if this implies some sort of passivity on behalf of the public. Thus, the media and social networks can be valuable agents in combatting stereotypes (Silva & Freischlag, 2017), as they provide opportunities for self-representation and accurate images of the nursing profession and work description.

The image of nurses produced by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic as caregivers, counsellors, educators, leaders and professionals at the highest levels with a central role in combatting the pandemic (Chen et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020) may minimize the past negative and misleading stereotypes of nursing professionals and the lack of knowledge on behalf of the public. Society expressed their support, love and gratitude to nurses who became their "heroes" fighting the war against COVID-19. This image shift and improvement, as (Girvin & Hutchinson, 2016) state, is a long-term process and it requires strategic steps which focus on public engagement and interaction with the profession. Moreover, according to (Taghinezhad et al., 2020) and (Zamanzadeh et al., 2022) disasters are rare and one of a kind opportunities for the public to understand and recognize the function and values of nursing, and for this reason our research question was: "What are the negative stereotypes about nursing which were challenged during the disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic?". Since image is also considered important to career choices by both psychologists and sociologists, (Roper, 1976) and WHO predicts a global need for nine million nurses by 2030 (WHO, 2016b) our second research question was: "Has the social image of nursing to the public and the self-image of nurses been improved by the media portrayals during the COVID-19 disaster?". The study of (Stolzenberg et al., 2023) which compared the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods, indicated that there is a decrease in the trust and respect exhibited by the public towards health professionals after the pandemic and when the social image of nursing does not coincide with the reality of the profession this may lead to professional dissatisfaction, burnout and conflicts, among other things, which prevents the quality of care, the users' satisfaction and social trust (Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012). Thus, a positive perception of nurses by the public can be the basis for

improving the quality of patient care and patients' satisfaction, while having a positive effect on the professionalism of nurses. An improved image of nursing can also be a driving force for positive changes through social and policy decision-making related to medical care. In this light, this integrative review aims to identify and describe the changes in the image of nurses before and after COVID-19 through online articles and the ways the COVID-19 disaster has challenged the negative stereotypes about nursing. The identification of studies, which could provide evidence of stereotypes associated with the nursing professionals the profession itself, the public image of nursing and professionals and the self-image of nurses would allow us to identify ways for negative nursing stereotypes to be challenged. According to (Girvin & Hutchinson, 2016) the improvement of image requires long-term and strategic solutions which focus on public engagement and interaction with the profession. This review lays the foundations for understanding the ways to improve the image of nursing and nurses, abolish the negative stereotypes and avoid their negative consequences in a world where there is an increased need and demand for nurses because of the aging populations (Flinkman, 2014).

Materials and Methods

This integrative review followed the methodological framework developed by (Whittemore & Knaf, 2005) which includes the five following steps:

- identification of the research problem;
- search strategy design and literature search;
- data assessment;
- critical analysis of selected data and synthesis;
- presentation of selected data.

Aim

The aim of this review was to identify the changes in the image of nurses and the nursing profession five years before WHO declared COVID-19 as an international public health crisis and one year after WHO declared that the COVID-19 would no longer be listed as an international public health emergency; to identify any positive shift in the social image of nursing to the public; to identify any positive changes in the self-image of nurses during the COVID-19 disaster.

Research Questions

The research question of this review: What are the negative stereotypes about nursing which were challenged during the disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic? Has the social image of nursing to the public been improved by the media portrayals during the COVID-19 disaster? Has the self-image of nurses been improved by the media portrayals during the COVID-19 disaster?

Design

After the research problem was identified and the questions and the aims of this review were stated the research team developed a meticulous literature research strategy. Next commenced the relevant literature search according to the set strategy and limitations. The database explored was PubMed. In order to

identify and understand potential shifts in the public and social image of nurses and the nursing profession and the self-image of nurses during the COVID-19 disaster, the literature research was time limited to relevant articles from a short period before the pandemic and relevant studies after the official declaration of its end by WHO in 2024. The research team set the "pre - COVID-19" period as five years before March 11th 2020 when WHO characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic outbreak (World Health Organization, 2022) and as "post - COVID-19" period we set the timeline between May 5th 2023 (United Nations, 2024), when WHO officially declared the end of the pandemic, until May 2024, which is a year later. This time span for the dates between January 2015 and May 2024 provided the opportunity to examine articles indicating long-term changes in the image of nursing in the period before the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and compare them to potential changes during the pandemic period and after the official declaration of the end of the pandemic. The search was limited to studies in English, Spanish and Greek and all research included had to be available as a full-text article. The search in PubMed, used the **keywords:** **nurse, nursing, stereotypes, status, public image, social image, social perception, social representation and self-image**. The keywords used in the search by title and abstract contained natural language.

Data Assessment

Before initiating the search on the PubMed database the research established a rigorous search strategy. A data extraction form which stated the required variables to be collected was developed. The included variables answered the questions of the study and met the aim of this integrative review.

The inclusion criteria were the following:

- Original or review articles of quantitative or qualitative studies with the aim to identify or/and describe stereotypes of the nursing profession, the public image of nurses and their profession and the nurses self-image.
- Original or review articles of quantitative or qualitative studies with the aim to identify or/and describe the perception of nurses or of the public about the nursing profession and/or the professionals.
- Year of Publication (2015-2024): the search was prefixed in the five last years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the years after the WHO officially declared the end of the pandemic dating to the current period.
- Original or review articles of quantitative or qualitative studies in the Languages of English, Spanish and Greek.
- All research included had to be available as a full-text article.
- Original or review articles of quantitative or qualitative studies, including literature reviews which focused more on the most current image of the profession.

The exclusion criteria were the following

- The inability to access the full text.
- Repeated articles.
- Related studies in languages other than English, Spanish or Greek.
- Year of publication before 2015.

- Related studies with a focus on a more historical vision of the nursing profession.
- Studies which were not related to the research problem or questions and offered a more historical view.
- The article included only one case study.

Critical Analysis of Selected Data and Synthesis

The initial literature search by the two reviewers who applied the search limits resulted in 108 citations. When duplicates were removed, 82 citations remained. The two researchers later screened the citations on title, leaving 64 citations for further assessment. The citations were then selected by screening abstracts and titles applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The data was simultaneously extracted by two researchers who applied the same pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria independently and separately. When they collected the data from the selected database of PubMed the two reviewers compared the articles in a joint analysis. The remaining 64 abstracts were further assessed by both reviewers on relevance to the purpose of the study, resulting in 53 articles.

After discarding the repeated articles and the articles they mutually agreed did not meet at least one of the inclusion

or exclusion criteria the reviewers assessed the remaining 53 articles studies more detailed. According to the agreed criteria for the exclusion of related studies with a focus on a more historical vision of the nursing profession 8 articles were excluded leaving 45 articles.

After comparing the two data extraction forms which completed each other, 45 articles remained for more detailed assessment. 6 case study articles were further excluded according to the criteria of articles with only one case study, since according to the initial design strategy this type of research could pose limits to the qualitative analysis. Finally, another 24 articles were excluded because of the limitation of the publication year. Finally, both researchers agreed by consensus on the inclusion of 15 articles in this review. The chosen articles included studies examining the role of stereotypes in the public image of nurses and the nursing profession, studies analyzing the social image, self-image, public and self-perception of nurses according to the nursing stereotypes. The selected articles also examined the public perception of nurses about their role and the reality of the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 1 shows a flow chart of the selection process.

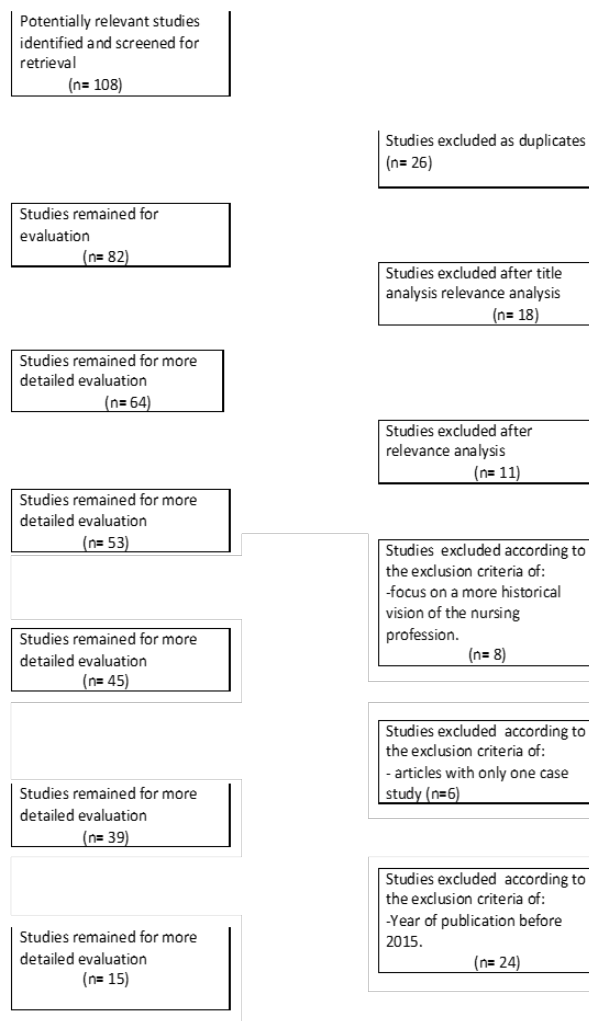


Figure 1: Flow chart of study selection process.

After this stage, a content analysis of the included studies was conducted in order to first appraise the quality of the selected studies.

Quality Appraisal

As according to (Cooper, 1998) and (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) it is crucial to evaluate the quality of the primary sources in integrated reviews, the quality of the primary selected sources was evaluated by the methodology of the Joanna Briggs institute (JBI) quality appraisal tools of checklists. For the qualitative studies the researchers used the Checklist for Qualitative Research and the Checklist for Analytical Cross Sectional Studies was used for the quantitative studies. Two researchers (G.K & E.M) reached consensus on the methodological quality of the studies based on discussing the results of the quality appraisals they initially conducted independently. After also reviewing the templates for the different methodologies independently the two researchers assessed and discussed the criteria in detail to avoid misinterpretations.

After the quality appraisal, a content analysis of the included studies was conducted in order to systematically identify their main features on the basis of the terms public image, social image, self-image and professional self-image in relation to the social image. Both researchers read the selected studies exhaustively and individually using an analytical comparative framework. The perceptions identified were collected by both researchers individually on a spreadsheet for further analysis. The two researchers compared their spreadsheet codes, identified as sub-categories then analysed and synthesized them as main categories. The collected data included authors' names,

year and country of publication, aim of the study, study design, sample, instrument(s), data analysis and outcomes of each study. The main outcomes in relation to public image, social image, self-image and professional self-image in relation to the social image. The data analysis process was undertaken by both researchers individually and then discussed and verified between them and in the research group. The information obtained was synthesized, summarized and described in a table which also described the main results of each included study in summary. These main features of the 15 included studies are presented in Table 1.

Fifteen articles were included in this review. In methodological terms the articles included are four (4) qualitative studies and eleven (11) quantitative studies. The included studies were heterogeneous with respect to design, sample and setting. Study samples included professional nurses (5), applicants to nursing programs (2), students in nursing schools and different educational departments in health care (1) and the general public (7).

Regarding the settings of the included qualitative studies one (1) study was conducted in a hospital setting in Poland using hospital nurses as sample, one (1) study was conducted at a nursing school in Finland with participants being applicants for a BSc in nursing, one (1) study was conducted in Iran among applicants enrolling in nursing schools in the area of western Iran and one (1) was conducted in Pakistan among nurses for person-centered care. The eleven (11) included quantitative studies were conducted in Turkey (6), Iran (1), Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (1), Israel (1), Italy (1) and Indonesia (1).

Qualitative Studies			
Author, Year, Country	Aim	Study Design, Sample, Date Collection Method and Analysis	Main Results
Wałowska, K., Domaradzki, J. 2023. Poland	To explore nurses' experiences with respect to how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the social image of nursing.	Semi-structured interviews with 15 hospital nurses (n=15).	The pandemic promoted the public image of nursing but nurses were disappointed that in the healthcare crisis they struggled with difficult working conditions, professional, social and economic recognition.
Glerean, N., Hupli, M., Talman, K., Haavisto, E. 2019. Finland	To explore nursing applicants' perceptions of the nursing profession and identify the factors influencing their perceptions.	Exploratory qualitative design using 3 focus group interviews among 18 (n=18) applicants to undergraduate Bachelor of Science (BSc) nursing programmes. The interviews were recorded transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis.	Applicants stated that 1)nursing requires suitable attitude and character with knowledge, theoretical competence and good general education 2)nurses work in multi-professional teams 3)nursing tasks require a caring role of a nurse. 4)the decision-making in nursing is limited. Nursing is a secure job with versatile career options which were not fully recognised. Personal factors, family and friends, media and career counselling at school influenced applicants' perceptions of the nursing profession. However, these perceptions were one-sided and partly unrealistic.
Zamanzadeh, V., Ghahramanian, A., Valizadeh, L., & Bagheriyeh, F. (2023). Iran	To explore the perceptions of nursing applicants about their chosen profession. To explore the factors which influenced their understanding	A qualitative study with a conventional content analysis design. Participants: 19 nursing applicants enrolling in nursing schools in three provinces of western Iran with a mean age of 20 years. 11 participants were female. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The content analysis of the interviews was according to Zhang and Wildemuth.	The nature of nursing work encompasses a limited level of independence; it is mostly a feminine profession, and a job with spiritual rewards. The content of nursing includes providing help and patient care in the hospital with a focus on performing procedural tasks. Nurses' characteristics include strong physical endurance, communication skills, emotional strength and low intellectual skills. The professional status of nursing is: having high job security but limited potential for career advancement and professional growth. Factors influencing applicants' perceptions: media, academic-career counsellors, personal factors, family and friends.
Younas, A., Inayat, S., & Masih, S. 2023. Pakistan	To explore what nurses perceive as barriers in their profession when delivering person-centered care to complex patients with chronic conditions patients in acute care settings.	Descriptive qualitative design following the COREQ guidelines were for reporting. Semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 19 nurses in two hospitals. Data were analysed using deductive thematic analysis guided by the Theoretical Domains Framework (14 domains about factors affecting behaviours).	The perceived barriers were related to social environment, resources, social influences, emotions, knowledge deep-rooted social and cultural beliefs about nurses' image, patients' expectations and families' preference for home remedies over specialised nursing care, organisational issues and power struggles.

Uysal, N., Demirdağ, H. 2022. Turkey	To explore the nursing public image during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Subjects were 663 people in Turkey not in the nursing profession. A sociodemographic data form was prepared by the researchers and a questionnaire with questions on the image of nursing. The McNemar Test was used for statistical analysis.	Compared to the prepandemic period the research subjects have positive views towards the nursing profession. Nursing is accepted as a profession that is well known and respected but with difficult working conditions. Nurses are still perceived as “doctors’ assistants”.
Ndirangu, E. W., Sarki, A. M., Mbekenga, C., Edwards, G. 2021. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.	To explore views regarding the image of nursing and midwifery among nurses and midwives in three East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.	An exploratory descriptive cross-sectional online study administered using Survey Monkey Questionnaires to assess the perceptions of nurses and midwives regarding the image of nursing and midwifery professions. 551 participants mostly from Kenya (39.7%) and Uganda (32.9%). with females (61.8%), registered nurses/ midwives aged 30–39 years being the majority. The data was analysed with Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s Chi square tests. The semi-structured questions were analysed using content analysis.	About two-thirds of the nurses and midwives in perceived nursing/midwifery as trusted and respected professions and expressed having a level of control over how their image was portrayed. However, they were conscious that the public had mixed responses about the nursing/ midwifery professions. Specifically, some members of the public described nurses/ midwives as professionals, knowledgeable and caring, others perceived nurses/ midwives to be rude, cruel, unkind, lazy and maids.
Blau, A., Sela, Y., Grinberg, K. 2023. Israel	To explore the relationship between the public’s perceptions and attitudes to the nursing profession compared with other healthcare professions. To explore the relationship with the image of nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic.	A cross-sectional study, with a descriptive correlational design. And an anonymous questionnaire. 80 respondents, men and women aged 18–75.	There was a positive relationship between the public’s perceptions and attitudes to nursing compared with other professions and the image of nursing during COVID-19. The more positive public opinion, the more positive the image of nursing.
Sayilan, A. A., Kulakac, N. 2023. Turkey	To explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perception and image of the nursing profession among nurses working in surgical units.	A cross-sectional, correlational study with 216 nurses. The random sampling method was used. The data was collected by an information form, the Perception of Nursing Professional Scale (PNPS), and the Scale for the Image of the Nursing Profession. The nurses’ mean age was 32.53 ± 9.16 years (min 21, max 57) and their mean professional experience was 16.44 ± 9.80 years (min 1, max 44).	Female nurses had significantly higher positive perceptions of nursing levels than male nurses. Gender, during the pandemic, and perception of the nursing profession significantly affected image perceptions of nursing. Nurses working in surgical units during the COVID-19 pandemic exhibited a good level of professionalism and image perception concerning nursing.

Yavaş, G., Özerli, A. N. 2023. Turkey	To explore the public image of the nursing profession during the COVID-19 pandemic.	A cross-sectional study with 502 participants aged 18 and over who were Turkish speakers from seven regions of Turkey. Data collection between May and July 2021 by an online survey, Image Scale for the Nursing Profession (ISNP), and Personal Information Form.	Participants with healthcare-related occupations who were satisfied with the nursing care they received in the hospital had a more positive view of nurses. The value, respect, and trust given to nurses increased with the COVID-19 pandemic.
Rubbi, I., Lupo, R., Lezzi, A., Cremonini, V., Carvello, M., Caricato, M., Conte, L., Antonazzo, M., Caldararo, C., Botti, S., Andretta, V., Lattarulo, P., Vitale, E. 2023. Italy	To explore the Social and Professional Image of the Nurse.	An online snowball sampling survey among 564 individuals of the Italian population using social networks between August 2022 and January 2023. The Nursing Attitude Questionnaire (NAQ) was used to collect data.	Nursing stereotypes were more prevalent in the north and the center of Italy. The sample acknowledged a unique competence inherent to nurses that cannot be replaced by other professionals. The nursing profession was perceived as pivotal within the IHS (Integrated Health System). However, the attractiveness of the profession remains exceedingly low.
GündüzHoşgör, D., Coşkun, F. 2024. Turkey	To explore Turkish people's perception of nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic.	The sample was 420 Turkish citizens. The "Descriptive Characteristics Form" and "Nursing Image Scale" were used to collect data. Descriptive analysis, the t-test and One-Way ANOVA test were used.	Turkish people's nursing image during the COVID-19 pandemic was highly positive. Their perceptions of nurses changed for the better during the pandemic and their awareness of nursing improved.
Sommers, C. L., Tarihoran, D. E., Sembel, S., Tzeng, H. M. 2018. Indonesia	To explore how non-nurses and nurses differ regarding the perceived images and expected roles of Indonesian nurses.	A cross-sectional survey study via an online tool shared via email. A convenience sample of 1,228 nursing and non nursing employees of a private university located in Karawaci, Indonesia, 143 completed the survey 13 were nurses and 130 non-nurses. An English/Indonesian version of the survey was developed: 19 perception items and 19 expectation items using a 5-point Likert scale. Independent sample t tests were used to compare groups.	Compared with nurses, non-nurses were less likely to agree with statements that Indonesian nurses are self-sacrificing, provide help to others, are devoted to caring, perform housekeeping duties and are knowledgeable. Monitoring nurses' image on a regular basis is essential.
Roshangar et al., 2021. Iran	To explore the association between the nurses' perception of the public image (PI) of nursing and the quality of nursing work life	A descriptive correlational study. Sample:250 nurses of 12 hospitals affiliated with Tabriz University of Medical Sciences using a proportionate stratified sampling technique. Porter Nursing Image Scale and Brooks QNWL Scale were used for collecting data.	Enhancement of nurses' psychological status (nurses' perception of the public image of their profession) may improve their functional status, i.e. quality of nursing work life.

McKenna, L., Mambu, I. R., Sommers, C. L., Reisenhofer, S., & McCaughan, J. 2023. Turkey	To explore nursing students' professional image perceptions and the affecting factors during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey.	Sample: All nursing students (N = 750) of two universities in Turkey. The research data was collected by a personal information form and the Scale for the Image of Nursing Profession (SINP).	The students' image perceptions toward the nursing profession were found to be at a good level. This indicates that the image perception toward nursing profession increased during the pandemic. The place where the students were during the pandemic and their thoughts about the nursing profession affect their professional image perceptions.
Apaydin Cirik, V., Gül, U., & Aksoy, B. 2022. Turkey	To explore: 1. the image of nursing for undergraduate health sciences students; 2. factors affecting that image; 3. students' views and experiences regarding that image.	An explanatory sequential, mixed method design with variant participant selection. Data collection in two consecutive phases. Quantitative data and qualitative interviews. Quantitative phase: descriptive and cross-sectional method. Participants: 1556 in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th year during the 2019–2020 academic year. Students from: nursing, emergency & disaster management, nutrition & dietetics, occupational health & safety, health management, social work departments. Data analysis: descriptive statistics and the independent-samples t-test, Mann-Whitney U test, one-way ANOVA, and stepwise linear regression. Qualitative phase: phenomenological research. 29 volunteers interviewed on the phone. Data collection: introductory information form, a nursing image scale, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis: thematic.	The department of education, the age and year of study influenced the participants image of nursing and their desire to recommend the nursing profession. The image of nursing was higher for students in nursing departments. Detecting nursing image early can increase professional training and improve the professional image of nursing.

Table 1: The main features of the 15 included studies

Findings

Presentation of selected Data

Professional Nurses perceptions of the nursing public image and their own self-image

In the present integrative review the public image of nursing and the social perceptions about nurses before and after the COVID-19 pandemic is described through the following categories:

1. Perceptions of professional nurses' regarding the public image of nurses and the social discernments about nurses,
2. Perceptions of nursing students and nursing school applicants regarding the public image of nursing and the social discernments about nurses,

3. Perceptions of the public regarding the image of nurses and the nursing profession.

Perceptions of professional nurses' regarding the public image of nurses and the social discernments about nurses

Five articles are included in this review regarding the nurses' perceptions on the public image of nursing and the social image of nurses. According to (Walowska et al., 2023) although many hospital nurses in Poland received positive reactions and public gratitude during the COVID-19 pandemic several others felt undervalued as during the pandemic they faced discrimination and prejudice. In general, Polish hospital nurses acknowledged that the pandemic increased their social visibility, as essential healthcare workers, but they were frustrated that in

times of healthcare crisis, they still had to struggle for social, professional and economic recognition. They experienced work overload with staff shortages and side tasks irrelevant to their work. Although the social image of nurses was strengthened by the pandemic revealing the role of nurses as hard-working, well-educated, highly skilled and independent professionals nurses still felt victims to government negligence. The COVID-19 health disaster helped the public overcome harmful stereotypes of nurses thus improving nurses' self-esteem and professional identity, however the frequent highlights by the Polish government, the media and patients of the gendered stereotype of nurse as caring and empathetic professionals further undermined nurses' professionalism and diverted social attention from the required education to become a competent nurse.

As the study of (Younas et al., 2023) indicated specialized nursing care nurses in Turkey felt barriers in their professional nursing work because of negative deep-rooted social and cultural beliefs about the image of nurses, organisational issues, power struggles, unrealistic patients' expectations and families' preference for home remedies over specialised nursing care. Deep-rooted social issues and stereotypes also delay patients' health-seeking and nurses' abilities to understand patients' needs and provide care. Interpersonal hostility between nurse-patient-families and doctor-nurses conflicts also affect collaborative efforts towards optimal care. Many organisational factors such as workload, staffing issues, limited resources for care and support, long duty hours, lack of sleep, negative patient behaviors, lack of appreciation and limited emotional support, power struggles among nurses and physicians, hostility towards nurses and authoritarian and condescending attitudes of physicians also constitutes reasons for nurses' mental and physical exhaustion and have a negative impact on their work performance and self-esteem. As (Roshangar et al., 2021) point out there is a positive relationship between the nurses' perception of their public image and their quality of work life. Thus improving the public image of the nursing profession can lead to an increase in the quality of nursing work life, whereas a negative public image of nursing is associated with a low quality of work life for nurses. In this regard, the nurses in Iran have mostly a positive self-perception of their profession contrary to previous studies which revealed that Iranian nurses had a negative image of nursing and believed that the nursing profession is not well perceived by the public. The negative perceptions of their job practice, dissatisfaction with the quality of working life and poor performance on behalf of Iranian nurses are mostly related to understaffing, heavy workloads, ambiguous organizational goals and policies, job stress, unconventional work hours, lack of support from managers and supervisors, inequality and discrimination in workplace, conflicts with colleagues, managers, and doctors, lack of opportunities for advancement and lack of appreciation from superiors.

Interestingly the public image of nursing in Iran is more positive for male rather than female nurses maybe because male nurses have better job opportunities and security compared to other

professions in the current financial crisis in Iran. Also, the Iranian patriarchal healthcare system helps male nurses move up the ladder through the support they receive from physicians, and offer them unique career insights with higher pay. It is also worth noting that income, autonomy and professional independence were among the important factors improving the quality of nursing work life in Iran (Roshangar et al., 2021), whereas according to (McKenna et al., 2023) Indonesian nurses and nursing students were largely motivated to follow the profession by a need to serve others and God, a personal calling into nursing and the influence of family. Although this may be partly related to the fact that the study in Indonesia was conducted in a faith-based university salary, professional status and work flexibility were not primary considerations and motivations for Indonesian nurses as opposed to Iran and western countries such as Norway where a study indicated that nursing students from immigrant backgrounds were more motivated by salary, status, and work flexibility than non-immigrants (Maurud, 2021). In the study of (Sayilan & Kulakac, 2023) nurses working in surgical units in Turkey exhibited good levels of professional perception and image during the COVID-19 pandemic despite the heavy workloads. Female nurses in this department had higher perceptions of the profession and higher positive image perception levels concerning the nursing profession than men indicating that the image of nursing was affected by gender. Specifically young nurses working in the mother and child health unit had even more positive perceptions.

Perceptions of nursing students and nursing school applicants regarding the public image of nursing and the social discernments about nurses

Three articles are included in this review regarding the perceptions of nursing students and nursing school applicants on the public image of nursing. In the study of (Apaydin et al., 2022) comparing the views on the public image of nurses between undergraduate nursing students in Turkey and students in other departments it is indicated that nurses view the nursing profession more positive than students in other departments. Specifically younger nursing students have a more positive perception of nurses. Although students from other health care departments view nurses as altruistic and devoted professionals, the majority views them negatively describing them as disrespectful, rude, unsuccessful maids, tired, indifferent and doctors' assistants with a moderate social status. In particular medical students view nurses as aggressive who sometimes behave as physicians, while most physicians and patients view them as assistants to physicians. Even some nurses and midwives also have this negative view. These general perceptions are in line with the relevant research indicating a negative image of nursing in Turkey. Influenced by social stereotypes of nurses non-nursing students in Turkey view the profession as sexualized and nurses as uneducated females subordinate to physicians who chose this profession because of family pressure or economic gain expectations. Negative perceptions about the nursing profession are also attributed to discouragement by high academic demands in later years of study, the difference between education and practice, the

scarce guidance for nurses in Turkish clinics leading nurses to professional burnout, low job satisfaction and low self-confidence. Also differences in education and the lack of male nurses play a key role in these negative perceptions. (Apaydin et al., 2022) also indicate that the self-image of nurses in Turkey as professionals is affected by the social nursing image which in turn affects the professional autonomy and job performance of nurses influencing young people's decision to pursue the profession.

According to (Glerean et al., 2019) in Finland applicants in nursing schools had negative perceptions related to the nature of nursing work at the application stage. These perceptions resulted from social influences, the social image of nursing, family and friends who constitute sources of information and lack of support for a career in nursing by their environment, peers and close relatives even if they were nurses themselves. The negative perceptions of nursing applicants do not reflect the image of a modern nurse while they are associated with the recruitment of new generations to the field. Psychological distress caused by difficult work environments has also been linked to younger nurses leaving the profession. Lack of support from the family is associated with not choosing nursing as a career, while the negative image that Finnish nurses themselves have of their profession has been linked to the negative public image of nursing, which in return influences nurses' attitudes toward their own work. In Finland the stereotyped traditional caregiver image of nurses and subordination to medicine is still prevalent in nursing applicants. Nursing is considered as a steady job, with economical security and variety of different places to work, without however career development possibilities describing a more horizontal career development in terms of changing the nursing setting or area. The public image of nursing in Finland is influenced by the media's presentation of nurses, which has been stated to present nursing in unrealistic ways. (Zamanzadeh et al., 2023) indicated that in Iran nursing applicants view the nature of nursing work with a limited level of independence because of the low social image of the profession and the ambiguity of nursing roles in society. They view it as a feminine profession with spiritual rewards, while nurses are viewed as patient and kind care providers with a focus on performing procedural tasks. Iranian nursing applicants consider that nurses should have strong physical endurance to perform their many duties quickly and without getting tired, communication skills, emotional strength and low intellectual skills. Similar to the Finnish nursing applicants, Iranian nursing applicants perceive the nursing profession as a job with high security, availability of posts and assurance of employment but with limited career advancement and growth. It is worth noting that the Iranian nursing applicants' perceptions of the content of nursing work are identified in the categories of 'helping and caring role in the hospital' and 'procedure-oriented'. Iranian nursing applicants also maintain that nurses only monitor the patient's condition in accordance with physicians' opinions and make decisions in very limited cases with an emphasis on physicians making key decisions about patient care and recovery.

Perceptions of the public regarding the image of nurses and the nursing profession

Seven articles are included in this review regarding the perceptions of the public on the image of nurses and the nursing profession. According to (Ndirangu et al., 2021) nurses, other healthcare workers and members of the public in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have varying attitudes and perceptions about the nursing profession. Although nurses have generally a more positive viewpoint about their profession other healthcare professionals and members of the public also view nurses as professional, knowledgeable, trustworthy and caring professionals. Others view them as inferior, rude, unkind lazy maids. (Ndirangu et al., 2021) point out that a more positive view about the nursing profession has a strong positive correlation with the work behavior and self-image of nurses. It is worth noting that nurses who have positive perceptions and self-image are frequently nurses with limited interaction with the public. The contemporary public perceptions of nursing in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda is guided by the following factors: misrepresentation of the nursing profession by the media, nurses not respected but trusted and poor understanding of the role of nurses. The Turkish public perception of nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic according to (Gündüz et al., 2024) was positively changed. The pandemic conditions greatly raised the society's awareness of the importance of nurses who are considered as the backbone of strong healthcare systems, worldwide. However, despite the positive change of the public perception of nurses, it is a fact that in Turkey, nursing is still perceived as a low- status profession whose members assist the physician and families with low socio-economic status encourage their female children to become nurses because they have more opportunities to get employed.

The Italian public opinion about the nursing profession in northern and central Italy attributed nursing value equivalent to that of physicians, endorsing and recognizing nurses as a valuable asset for people with health problems. People in the south attributed more sensitive characteristics to nurses and credited the same importance to nurses and physicians. Citizens from northern and central Italy compared to the south stressed the matter of nurses being inadequately paid actually viewing nursing as an autonomous practice. They did not believe in the perception of nurses as mere executors of physicians' orders. Also, they considered that inadequate salary, insufficient political representation, the association of nursing with the female gender being more inclined toward caregiving than a university career, the lack of respect, full autonomy and authority in critical decision-making processes and the unsatisfactory nursing work environment as persistent negative stereotypes of nurses (Rubbi, et al., 2023). The public view of the nursing profession in Turkey saw positive changes due to the pandemic according to the study of (Uysal et al., 2022). It is important to note that the same study indicated that the rate of those who believe that male nurses are necessary to improve the status of the profession is also high. However, the profession still cannot shed its traditional image as low- status female profession subservient to doctors (Uysal et al., 2022). (Yavas et al., 2023) also point out that the COVID-19 pandemic

positively influenced the public perception of nursing raising trust, and respect for nurses, however they stress that there are concerning findings regarding the increase in violence in the nursing profession. Similarly, the image of nursing in Israel according to (Blau et al., 2023) is perceived as more positive because of the COVID-19 pandemic which created positive public's attitudes to nurses and perceptions of nursing, compared to other professions. This was true for all members of the public independently of sociodemographic variables, while the more positive image of nursing influenced the nurses' identity and role, the clinical practice, work satisfaction, and the quality of care. In Indonesia non nursing faculty in a private university agreed less with the perception statements that Indonesian nurses are self-sacrificing, provide help to others, devoted to caring, knowledgeable and committed to housekeeping duties. They agreed more with the perception statement that Indonesian nurses are assistants to physicians and they expect them to be intelligent and analytical assistants to physicians (Sommers et al., 2018).

Limitations

There are some limitations to be considered in the present review. Firstly, one of the limitations of is language. As studies published in languages other than English, Spanish and Greek were excluded, other studies of potential interest to this review may not have been included. Secondly, because of the limited amount of articles in the English, Spanish and Greek language within the set time span for this review the quality of the selected study varied, even though according to (Grant & Booth 2009) it is a widely accepted practice for integrative method reviews. Thirdly, the abovementioned limitations limit the generalizability of the findings even though the present review underlines the need for further studies regarding the social and public image of nurses and the nursing profession as well as the self- image of nurses. Further studies may also facilitate the better understanding of nurses and their profession making it more appealing to the perception of the public and potential students. Lastly, the heterogeneous nature of the selected articles in terms of samples and methods renders a rigorous qualitative analysis of the conclusions more difficult to be described. Despite these limitations, the benefits of this integrative review should be acknowledged, mostly because there is a limited amount of recent reviews on this topic after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and thus this review narrowsthe gap in the literature regarding the shifts in the public image of nursing and the perceptions about nurses.

Discussion

One of the main findings of this review is that the public image of nursing continues to be distorted by deep-rooted cultural stereotypes of being a caregiving profession for females. Although the public perception of nursing has improved with the COVID-19 pandemic regardless of sociodemographic variables the traditional image of nursing being a low status profession subservient to doctors has not yet been shed. The numerous artistic pictures, videos, interviews and articles of nurses' bravery and dedication published on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic increased nurses' their social

visibility, as essential healthcare workers and revealed the role of nurses as hard-working, well-educated, highly skilled and independent professionals recognizing nurses as indispensable assets in the healthcare community. However, according to (Bennett et al., 2020) this glorification of nurses during the pandemic shifted the attention on nurses in partly in order to conceal the governments' inability to respond efficiently to the healthcare crises and devise a plan for healthcare workers. In this regard (Mohammed et al., 2021) argue that the "hero discourse" of nurses was a political tool which "normalized" the nurses' exposure to the dangerous working conditions during the pandemic by justifying these risks as inevitable in the professional life of nurses thus preserving existing power relationships which limit the ability of nurses to negotiate better working conditions. According to the findings of this review nurses felt unprepared to work during the pandemic and unsupported by the government leading to the frustration that in times of healthcare crisis, they still had to struggle for social, professional and economic recognition. During the pandemic they still experienced work overload with staff shortages and side tasks irrelevant to their work. Barriers in the nursing profession such as ambiguous organizational goals and policies, job stress, unconventional work hours, lack of support from managers and supervisors, inequality and discrimination in workplace, conflicts with doctors, unappreciation from superiors and lack of opportunities for advancement were still present during the COVID-19 pandemic and after its end constituting the main reasons for young people not to choose the profession and for nurses to have a negative self-image as professionals.

Another important finding is that factors such as the media's characterization of nursing as a problematic profession, the underestimation of nursing, the fact that the profession is not respected despite nurses themselves are trusted have an adverse impact on the perceptions of the nursing profession by the public rendering the media as the main means of influence. Of course, as the study of (Rubbi, et al., 2023) indicated citizens from more affluent areas were more conscious about facts such as the inadequate salaries of nurses, the non-autonomous view of the nursing profession, the misconception of nurses as mere executors of physicians' orders, the insufficient political representation of the nursing profession, the association of nursing with the female gender, the lack of respect, full autonomy and authority in critical decision- making processes and the unsatisfactory nursing work environment. As the public, nurses themselves and applicants to nursing schools continue to have varying attitudes and perceptions about the nursing profession the findings of this review emphasize the fact that the more positive the image of nursing is the more positive it influencesthe nurses' identity and role, the clinical practice, work satisfaction, and the quality of care. Specifically, a more positive public image of the nursing profession can also influence more positively the decision to enter the profession. However, even if a more positive public view about the nursing profession has a strong positive correlation with the work behavior and self-image of nurses and even if nurses have more positive views than members of the public about

their profession people still choose the profession for being a job with availability of posts and assurance of employment without however the possibility of career advancement, growth and autonomy.

It is worth noting that, in their study (McKenna et al., 2023) indicated that Indonesian nurses and nursing students were mainly motivated to follow the profession by a need to serve others and God. Salary, professional status and work flexibility were not primary considerations and motivations as opposed to Iran and western countries such as Norway where nursing students from immigrant backgrounds were more motivated by salary, status, and work flexibility than non-immigrants (Maurud, 2021). According to an extensive review of literature that shows that the public image of nursing is globally diverse and incongruous, depending on the country and the culture McKenna et al., (2023) point out that this image is mainly positive in developed countries with advanced health care and nursing systems and mostly negative in low- and middle-income countries with less advanced healthcare and nursing systems. Patriarchy is another characteristic of developing countries influencing the public image of nurses. For example, the public image of nursing in Iran is more positive for male rather than female nurses and male nurses have better job opportunities as the Iranian patriarchal healthcare system helps male nurses move up the ladder through the support they receive from physicians, and offers them higher pay. The findings in this review also indicated that in Iran, there is still no real understanding of the nursing field among the nursing applicants who enter nursing schools with a stereotypical and inaccurate picture of this major with insufficient interest and motivation. Also, in countries with low and middle income, applicants are inclined to enter the profession even if they are disinterested in it, have the old traditional understanding or a negative perception of it thus creating a future work force with possible negative effects on the nursing profession. For instance, in Turkey families with low socio-economic status encourage their female children to become nurses because they have more opportunities to get employed even if they perceive nursing as a low- status profession. Interestingly enough the study of (Uysal et al., 2022) indicated that there is a high percentage of Turkish citizens who believe that male nurses are necessary to improve the status of the profession despite the fact that gender attitude in Turkey has not been separated from the nursing profession as seen by the low presence of men in the nursing profession.

Conclusions

According to the findings of this integrative review, the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly caused a more positive shift in the public image of nursing by making the reality of this profession more visible to the public on a global basis. However, it is difficult to uproot deeply rooted misconceptions and traditional negative stereotypes and misconceptions about nurses and the nursing profession especially since they are tightly interconnected with each country's cultural background and history. The media also plays a key role to the distribution of a misrepresented image of nursing. The implications of a

distorted public image of the nursing profession are evident in the low self - image of nurses, the low allocation of public funds in the field, the low government protection and autonomy of nursing and the applicants' misunderstood perceptions for entering nursing schools. It is important that the findings of the present review inform policy makers and educators about key sources that affect the image of nursing globally and be used for further research and design of rigorous strategies to help improve the image of nursing and thus the self-image of nurses and the working conditions. It is also crucial to advocate the fight which Florence Nightingale first started for the establishment of the nursing profession as an indispensable and autonomous scientific and professional field in healthcare since this will have direct positive consequences on the self-image, social status and professional satisfaction of nurses as well as the allocation of resources in the profession.

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