

# Subjective Distress Disclosure: A Sample of Future Nurses: Descriptive Study

## Öznel Sıkıntıları Açma: Geleceğin Hemşireleri Örnekleme: Tanımlayıcı Araştırma

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**ABSTRACT Objective:** In this descriptive study, the subjective distress disclosure of future nurses was analysed. **Material and Methods:** The descriptive type of research was conducted with 569 students studying at the faculty of nursing in the 2022-2023 academic year. The data of the research are the "Introductory Information Form" and "Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale" created by the researcher. The data was collected by the researcher via Google form after the lessons were completed. Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test were used to analyze the data. **Results:** The mean scores of the self-disclosure subscale were 16.05±4.15; the mean scores of the self-concealment subscale were 23.29±5.08; and the mean total score of the subjective distress disclosure scale was 39.35±7.81. Female students were found to be more likely to disclose subjective distress than male students ( $p<0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** The level of subjective distress disclosure of nursing students who participated in this study was moderate. Courses taken by students during their nursing education; communication skills, assertiveness etc. It is thought that it affects the level of disclosure of subjective distress because it contains topics that support personal development. In order to ensure that future nurses can effectively cope with the difficult situations they encounter both in their social lives and in health care environments, it is recommended that educational programmes that support them to disclose their subjective distress should be included in the education programme.

**Keywords:** Nursing; nursing students; education

**ÖZET Amaç:** Bu tanımlayıcı araştırmada, geleceğin hemşirelerinin öznel sıkıntılarını açma durumları incelenmiştir. **Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Tanımlayıcı tipte olan araştırma 2022-2023 eğitim öğretim yılında, hemşirelik fakültesinde öğrenim gören 569 öğrenci ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın verileri araştırmacı tarafından oluşturulan "Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu" ve "Öznel Sıkıntıları Açma Ölçeği" dir. Veriler Google form aracılığıyla derslerin bitiminin ardından toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Mann-Whitney U testi ve Kruskal-Wallis testi kullanılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Öğrencilerin "Kendini açma" alt boyutu puan ortalamaları 16,05±4,15; "Kendini gizleme" alt boyutu puan ortalamaları 23,29±5,08; "Öznel Sıkıntıları Açma Ölçeği" toplam puan ortalamaları 39,35±7,81'dir. Kadın öğrencilerin öznel sıkıntılarını açma durumları erkeklerinkinden daha yüksek bulunmuştur ( $p<0,05$ ). **Sonuç:** Bu çalışmaya katılan hemşirelik öğrencilerinin, öznel sıkıntılarını açma düzeyi orta değerdedir. Öğrencilerin, hemşirelik eğitimi sürecinde aldıkları derslerin; iletişim becerileri, atılganlık vb. kişisel gelişimi destekleyen konular içermesi sebebiyle öznel sıkıntılarını açma düzeylerini etkilediği düşünülmektedir. Geleceğin hemşirelerinin gerek sosyal yaşamlarında gerekse sağlık bakım ortamlarında karşılaştıkları zor durumlar ile etkili baş etmelerini sağlamak amacıyla eğitim programına öznel sıkıntılarını açmalarını destekleyen eğitim programlarının dâhil edilmesi önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hemşirelik; hemşirelik öğrencileri; eğitim

From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the present day, the number of natural disasters such as epidemics, droughts, forest fires, floods and earthquakes has increased in our country as well as in the whole world, and continues to constitute a serious crisis for

the society.<sup>1</sup> The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), which started in China in 2019 and spread all over the world, disrupted the natural flow of life in Türkiye and affected human life in many negative ways.<sup>2</sup> Fear, anger, anxiety and introversion are

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among the main effects seen in all segments of the society.<sup>3</sup> However, following the economic crisis experienced today, the Kahramanmaraş-Hatay earthquake on 6 February 2023 was one of the biggest crises of Türkiye. With this earthquake, 10 cities were affected, thousands of buildings were destroyed and more than 50 thousand lives were lost.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, nurses have been at the forefront of the struggle to protect and improve public health in extraordinary situations that threaten health worldwide.<sup>5</sup> Nurses, who play an active role in the care and treatment of patients in the process of combating natural disasters and infectious diseases, often play an active role in the management of social crises by sacrificing their own needs due to moral and professional responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Nurses, who are the heart of health personnel, are the main human resource facing great risks and difficulties.<sup>6</sup> Nurses and nursing students may experience intense stress in the process of fulfilling heavy workload and daily responsibilities as well as the demands of individuals with health care needs and the health system. However, they can increase their quality of life by reducing their stress levels with the use of timely and effective coping mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> This situation draws attention to the process of gaining help-seeking behaviours and effective stress coping skills in the face of stressors that they may encounter in the nursing education process.

Skills such as self-knowledge, using effective communication skills, empathising, understanding the individual in need of help, coping effectively with the problems encountered, crisis management, problem solving are important steps that should be gained in the education process of the nursing profession where human-to-human relationship is at the forefront.<sup>8</sup> It serves as an act of intimacy and a strategy to maintain the relationship.<sup>9</sup> The famous Turkish psychologist Doğan Cüceloğlu states that “*Self-disclosure should be understood as sharing feelings and thoughts within the current time period, not as telling about past important events*”.<sup>10</sup> According to the American Psychological Association, self-disclosure in psychotherapy is defined as “*The act of disclosing personal or private information about oneself to other people*”.<sup>11</sup>

In the process of interpersonal communication, the quality of communication that individuals establish with each other can directly affect the quality of life. In this process, self-disclosure behaviour in interpersonal communication is of great importance for human beings who are social beings.<sup>12</sup> Using self-disclosure skills appropriately contributes to people’s ability to know and understand each other better, to deepen and gain continuity in human relations and to eliminate communication conflicts frequently encountered especially in health care environments, and as a result, to the formation of a well-founded personality.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the importance of self-disclosure in coping with the troubles experienced is emphasised in the following words: “He who does not tell his problem cannot find a cure”, “Joys increase as they are shared, sorrows decrease as they are shared”. It has also taken its place in Turkish culture by being emphasised with Turkish proverbs.<sup>14</sup> Mental health is one of the important components of the nursing profession.<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, stated that anxiety and depression are at high levels in nursing students; Tung et al., found that the total prevalence of depression in nursing students was 34%.<sup>16,17</sup> Cerit and Kaplan determined the post-traumatic growth of nursing students during the COVID-19 epidemic and the situations that affected it. In this regard, it has been determined that students who spend more time for themselves and think that the experienced events positively affect their personality give more positive answers.<sup>18</sup> In another study conducted in 2021, the effect of interpersonal relational role analysis on the anxiety levels and interpersonal problem-solving orientations of nursing students was examined. In this study, it was determined that the training given on role analysis in interpersonal relations had positive effects on students’ anxiety levels and problem-solving skills.<sup>19</sup> Nurses are people who help individuals in difficult situations, contribute to overcoming difficulties, and are role models with both their communication skills and problem-solving skills.<sup>20</sup> It is very valuable for them to open up about themselves and express the problems they experience in achieving all these expectations. In this study, the disclosure of subjective distress of future nurses was examined.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### STUDY DESIGN

This study is descriptive.

### SETTINGS AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted in 2022-2023 academic year at a nursing faculty of a university in Ankara, the capital city of Türkiye. The education period of this nursing faculty is 4 years (8 semesters). Each semester, students are required to choose at least 30 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) courses. If at least 240 ECTS is completed in total, students can graduate and work in health care environments by taking the title of nurse according to the regulation. In the first year, students take courses such as “Interpersonal Relations and Communication in the Field of Health”, which includes self-knowledge, awareness and interpersonal communication skills, and “Assertiveness and Life Satisfaction”, which includes assertive behaviour, psychiatric nursing course in the third year, and psychosocial care and nursing, effective approaches to psychosocial problems, addiction and psychosocial problems in the fourth year. In the final year, all students develop their skills in clinical practice for 31 hours a week for one year. During this practice process, they receive supervision from mentors, school coordinators and education nurses.

### DATA COLLECTION

There are 747 students studying at the faculty of nursing in the 2022-2023 academic year. The sample of the study consisted of 569 students who wanted to participate in the study. The data of the study were applied by the researcher through “Google Forms” (Google LLC CA, USA) after the end of the courses by informing about the research. It took approximately 7 minutes to collect the data. The research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Data collection tools were collected using the introductory information form created by the researcher and the “Subjective distress disclosure scale”.

Introductory Information Form: it includes questions about the students’ gender, date of birth, and class of study.

Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale: The Turkish validity and reliability of the scale developed by Kahn and Hessling was carried out by Gürsoy and Gizir. Consisting of 12 items, the scale is used to assess individuals’ tendency to disclose or conceal their subjective distress. The scale has a five-point Likert scale and has two subscales as “self-disclosure” and “self-concealment”. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> items in the scale are reverse coded. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 12 and the highest score is 60 points. A high score indicates that individuals tend to disclose their subjective distress. While the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.91, the Cronbach’s alpha value was 0.92 for “self-disclosure” and 0.86 for “self-concealment” as a result of the analysis conducted to determine the internal consistency of the scale.<sup>21,22</sup> In this study, the total score of the scale was calculated as 0.84. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.84, the Cronbach’s alpha value was 0.72 for “self-disclosure” and 0.88 for “self-concealment”.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive data were expressed as mean, standard deviation, number and percentage. The Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used to determine whether the data conformed to normal distribution. Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were used to analyse the data. Statistical significance was taken as  $p < 0.05$ .

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before starting the research, written permission was obtained from the University of Health Sciences Gülhane Scientific Research Ethics Committee (date: 11 November 2022; no: 2022-343). Permission was obtained from the authors for the use of the scale. After the participants were informed about the research, their consent was also obtained.

## RESULTS

Of the students participating in the study, 92.1% were female and 7.9% were male. 64.1% of the students were 21 years of age or older. When the class in which the students are studying is analysed; 31.5% of the students are studying in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 21.8% in

the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 23% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 23.7% in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (Table 1).

The mean scores of the self-disclosure subscale were 16.05±4.15, the mean scores of the self-concealment subscale were 23.29±5.08, and the mean total score of the subjective distress disclosure scale was 39.35±7.81 (Table 2).

The mean scores of “Self-Disclosure” subscale and total mean scores of “Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale” of female students were higher than those of male students (p<0.05). There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale and its subscales according to the class of the students (p<0.05). In the pairwise analyses conducted to determine from which group this difference originated, the mean scores of the self-disclosure subscale of the students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade were higher than those of the students studying in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (Z=-5.477; p=0.001); the mean scores of the self-disclosure subscale of the students studying in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade were higher than those of the students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (Z=-2.125; p=0.034) and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (Z=-5.636; p=0.001). The mean scores of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade stu-

dents in the self-concealment subscale were higher than those of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students (Z=-2.741; p=0.006) and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students (Z=-4.075; p=0.001). 1<sup>st</sup> grade students’ total mean scores on the subjective distress disclosure scale were higher than those of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students (Z=-3.277; p=0.001); 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students’ total mean scores on the subjective distress disclosure scale were higher than those of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students (Z=-2.852; p=0.004) and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students (Z=-5.636; p=0.001) (Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to determine the level of disclosure of the problems or problems experienced by nursing students. Nurses, who play a unique role in bringing together various health teams to ensure patient safety and well-being, actively work to improve health problems and find practical solutions to the problems encountered in the process of providing more qualified health care.<sup>23</sup> It is known that nurses working in health care environments where stress is experienced intensely experience anxiety, fear, fatigue and depression, and are more at risk of suicide than the general population.<sup>23,24</sup>

In intensive working environments, nurses are expected to be able to solve problems correctly and quickly. For this reason, in the nursing education process, students are expected to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for managing the stressors they encounter, problem solving, self-disclosure and overcoming the difficulties experienced.<sup>25</sup> Overcoming the stressful situations experienced is through effective coping skills that we acquire and apply.<sup>26</sup> Self-disclosure and self-concealment are the individual’s choices in coping with the challenging situations they experience.<sup>27</sup>

**TABLE 1:** Descriptive characteristics of students.

Descriptive characteristics		n	%
Gender	Female	524	92.1
	Male	45	7.9
Age	18-20	204	35.9
	21 and+	365	64.1
Grade of study	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	179	31.5
	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	124	21.8
	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	131	23
	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	135	23.7
Total		569	100

**TABLE 2:** Mean scores of students’ Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale and Its Subscales.

	Minimum-maximum	Median	$\bar{X}$	SD
Self-disclosure subscale	6-30	15	16.05	4.15
Self-concealment subscale	7-30	24	23.29	5.08
Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale	19-56	39	39.35	7.81

SD: Standard deviation.

**TABLE 3:** Mean scores of subjective distress disclosure scale subscales according to students' descriptive characteristics.

Descriptive characteristics	Self-disclosure subscale		Self-concealment subscale		Subjective Distress Disclosure Scale		
	Median	Minimum-maximum	Median	Minimum-maximum	Median	Minimum-maximum	
Gender	Female	16	9-30	24	8-30	39	19-56
	Male	15	6-27	18	7-30	33	20-56
		Z=-3.330 p=0.001		Z=-1.304 p=0.092		Z=-3.558 p=0.001	
Age	18-20	15	6-26	24	10-30	39	20-56
	21 and+	16	6-26	24	7-30	39	19-56
		Z=-1.306 p=0.107		Z=-1.070 p=0.284		Z=-1.682 p=0.093	
Grade of study	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	16	6-26	24	10-30	39	22-56
	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	13	9-21	23	10-30	36	20-51
	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	17	6-27	26	7-30	42	19-56
	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	15	9-30	24	8-30	39	22-56
		$\chi^2=48.542$ p=0.001		$\chi^2=17.226$ p=0.001		$\chi^2=31.494$ p=0.001	

The concept of self-disclosure, first defined by Sydney M. Jourard in 1958, is defined as the sharing of private and important information about oneself, including ideas, feelings, experiences and experiences, with the other individual and presenting one's identity to the other party.<sup>28</sup> It was determined that the students participating in the research disclosed themselves at a moderate level. In the study of Hanisa et al., it was observed that the self-disclosure levels of nursing students were at a medium level and that there was a negative relationship between self-disclosure and academic stress.<sup>29</sup> In the study conducted by Kim et al., in Korea, the levels of self-disclosure of nursing students were found to be at a medium level.<sup>30</sup> In our study, it is thought that the reason why students' level of revealing their subjective problems is not low is related to the courses they take (communication, assertiveness, etc.) and the university's emphasis on student clubs that support students' social and personal development.

The self-disclosure levels of female students participating in the study were found to be higher than those of male students. In the study of Çetinkaya and Akbaba in which they examined the relationship between self-disclosure behaviours and attachment styles of university students, it was stated that the self-disclosure levels of female students were higher

than those of male students.<sup>31</sup> These findings show that women are more willing to share issues about themselves than men. Self-disclosure, which is the process in which people verbally disclose themselves to others, is an important interpersonal skill in initiating, developing, maintaining and terminating therapeutic relationships.<sup>32</sup> In this direction, women's high levels of self-disclosure may make them more advantageous in maintaining interpersonal relationships and coping with their problems.

In the study, it was observed that the self-disclosure scores of the students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades were higher. This finding drew attention to the curriculum programme in the faculty where the research was conducted. In the first year, students take courses on self-knowledge, awareness, coping and effective communication skills. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, they take courses including communication skills, mental illnesses, effective nursing approaches to mental illnesses with the psychiatric nursing course. These courses raise awareness about the importance of self-disclosure and this is reflected in the research results. On the other hand, it can be thought that the level of disclosure of subjective distress increases with the education they receive and the experience they gain as their grades progress. In the study of Çetinkaya and Akbaba in which they examined the



relationship between self-disclosure behaviours and attachment styles of university students, it was stated that the self-disclosure levels of students studying in the last year were higher than other classes.<sup>25,31</sup> Nursing education is stressful as a result of their efforts to learn concepts ranging from the basics of protecting general human health to complex issues and health concerns.<sup>33</sup> During their education, it is aimed that nurse candidates, who serve healthy/patient individuals, families and society with both social problems and crisis, graduate equipped in every aspect.<sup>34</sup> Interventions that support students in overcoming the difficult situations they face in nursing education can strengthen students' mental health.<sup>35</sup> The single-centred conduct of this research is one of the limitations of the research. These data can only be generalised to this sample group.

## CONCLUSION

The level of disclosure of subjective distress of nursing students participating in this study is moderate. Gender and class of study affect the level of disclosure of subjective distress of the students. The level of subjective distress disclosure of female students is higher than that of male students. In this study, it is

thought that gender and classes taken by students during their nursing education affect their level of revealing subjective distress. Future nurses need to be able to effectively cope with the difficult situations they encounter in both their social lives and health-care environments. In this regard, it is recommended to integrate courses or training programs that support self-disclosure, including topics such as communication, assertiveness, and coping with stress, into the curriculum.

## Source of Finance

*During this study, no financial or spiritual support was received neither from any pharmaceutical company that has a direct connection with the research subject, nor from a company that provides or produces medical instruments and materials which may negatively affect the evaluation process of this study.*

## Conflict of Interest

*No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.*

## Authorship Contributions

*This study is entirely author's own work and no other author contribution.*

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