

## Professional Self-Concept among Public Health Nurses

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### ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to explore the level of professional self-concept among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla. The study employed a descriptive-analytical method and utilized a questionnaire consisting of 34 items with five-point Likert scale responses. These items were distributed across the three dimensions of professional self-concept: ideal, perceived, and social. After verifying the validity and reliability of the instrument, it was administered to a sample of 80 nurses.

Statistical analysis using the SPSS software revealed a high level of professional self-concept among public health nurses. The results indicated that the dimension of perceived professional self-concept achieved the highest mean, followed by the ideal professional self-concept, and lastly, the social professional self-concept. Additionally, the findings showed no statistically significant differences in the level of professional self-concept among the study sample based on gender or professional experience.

**Keywords:** Professional self-concept, public health nurse.

### INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession is a humanitarian and social vocation characterized by continuous communication and interaction with various parties. It involves performing highly demanding and complex tasks imposed by the nature of the profession and the specific activities it entails. Here lies the importance of a nurse's balanced and integrated personality, which is reflected in the extent to which the nurse perceives and conceptualizes their self in the workplace. This self-concept is, indeed, one of the most critical determinants of their success in pursuing their noble professional endeavors.

It is therefore logical that a nurse should possess an acceptable level of self-concept in general, and professional self-concept in particular, to achieve job satisfaction and demonstrate professional responsibility when dealing with patients, colleagues, and the challenges associated with the profession.

#### 1. Research Problem and Questions

According to Alnawaiseh (2013) a profession serves as a source of an individual's sense of value. It is closely tied to their self-esteem and the establishment of their professional identity. A profession relates to self-concept, as it is the work an individual will dedicate their life to, giving it meaning and allowing them to feel their social worth. A profession that aligns with an individual's abilities and interests helps them achieve personal growth and self-actualization (Samadi & Hawatmeh, 2020, p. 478).

Weng and McElroy (2009) argue that individuals with a clear professional self-concept exhibit greater psychological and professional adaptability. They can align themselves with the evolving demands of work roles and multiple responsibilities, as well as seek careers more compatible with their self-concept (Ben Sadek, 2015, p. 10).

The nursing profession, as a humanitarian and social vocation, involves interactions between the nurse and the patient, where the nurse's personality, emotions, values, thoughts, and behavior are manifested. These factors affect their professional performance either positively or negatively, reflecting, in one way or another, an aspect of their professional self-concept.

The concept of professional self-concept has garnered significant attention from psychologists and researchers in occupational psychology due to its role as a critical key to understanding an employee's personality and as an indicator of their compatibility with themselves, others, and the demands of the profession. Awareness of this concept also enhances control over an individual's behavior and career choices.

Given that a nurse should perceive a profession as suitable and reflective of their interests before choosing it, understanding the level of their awareness of professional self-concept is crucial for performing their tasks in healthcare facilities.

Al-Muhammad (2010), cited in Al-Ahmadi (2020, p. 191), mentions that professional self-efficacy plays a vital role in the quality of an individual's performance of professional duties. The nurse's self-awareness is considered a prerequisite for good performance. The higher the level of positive self-efficacy an individual enjoys, the more enthusiastic and productive they will be at work.

Based on the above, this study aims to explore the level of professional self-concept awareness among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla. To address the topic comprehensively, the research problem can be summarized in the following questions:

1.1 What is the level of professional self-concept awareness among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla?

1.2 What is the ranking of the dimensions of the professional self-concept scale according to the responses of the study sample?

1.3 Are there statistically significant differences in the level of professional self-concept awareness among the study sample based on gender?

1.4 Are there statistically significant differences in the level of professional self-concept awareness among the study sample based on professional experience?

## 2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the importance of its subject matter. Understanding the level of professional self-concept awareness and the various dimensions influencing it is crucial for professional practice among nurses. For individuals, a profession represents a way of life and reflects the environmental context in which they interact, rather than being merely a set of skills or practical tasks.

The study's findings can assist policymakers in the health sector in defining essential standards for joining the profession and identifying pathways for its advancement. Additionally, the results can guide the development of preparation and training programs that enhance professional self-concept. Furthermore, the study contributes to enriching the theoretical framework related to this topic.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

The current study aims to achieve the following:

- Serve as an evaluative study to identify the level of professional self-concept awareness among nurses in the city of Ouargla.
- Determine the ranking of the impact of the dimensions constituting professional self-concept based on the responses of the study sample.
- Investigate the extent to which professional self-concept is influenced by the variables of nurses' gender and professional experience.
- Contribute to providing recommendations that help maintain an acceptable level of professional self-concept and reduce deficiencies in this area.

## 4. Scope of the Study

The scope of the current study is limited to exploring the level of professional self-concept awareness among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla. The study was conducted on a sample of **80** individuals during the period from **February 4, 2024, to February 12, 2024**.

## 5. Operational Definition of Study Terms

### 5.1. Professional Self-Concept:

The concept of professional self-concept is defined as a hypothetical construct encompassing an individual's conscious perceptions and beliefs, which shape their self-image regarding their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional values within their field of work (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2017).

In this study, it is operationally defined as the perceptions and awareness of public health nurses in the city of Ouargla regarding their professional self-concept. It is measured by the score obtained on the Professional Self-Concept Scale by Talbishi (2019), which includes three dimensions used in the current study:

- A. Perceived Professional Self-Concept:** The individual's awareness of themselves as they truly are, in reality, rather than as they desire to be. This awareness includes their appearance, physical condition, abilities, and life roles.
- B. Ideal Professional Self-Concept:** The perceptions and images that define the ideal self the individual aspires to be and strives to achieve.
- C. Social Professional Self-Concept:** The individual's belief in their value as perceived by others during interactions, which influences their self-perception either positively or negatively (Al-Ahmadi, 2020, p 197).

### 5.2. Public Health Nurse:

The World Health Organization defines nursing as a science performed by a nurse with the purpose of assisting individuals, whether ill or healthy, in performing activities that contribute to improving or restoring their health in cases of illness (Hdeifa, 2023, p. 675).

In the context of this study, a public health nurse is operationally defined as an employee tasked with patient care in public healthcare institutions in the city of Ouargla. This individual holds a certification issued by the Ministry of Health, Population, and Hospital Reform, authorizing them to practice the nursing profession.

### 6. Research Methodology

Given that the goal of the current study is to determine the level of professional self-concept awareness among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla, it necessitated the adoption of the descriptive-analytical method. According to Al-Shaib (2009, p 26), this method involves collecting data about the phenomenon under study to test hypotheses or answer the research questions concerning the current state of individuals.

### 7. Study Sample

A sample is defined as a subset of elements from a specific research population (Angros, 2010, p. 301).

In the current study, the sample consisted of 80 nurses, selected randomly, with variation among its members in terms of gender and years of experience.

**Table (01) illustrates the distribution of the study sample according to the study variables.**

Variables		Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	24	30%
	Female	56	70%
Professional Experience	Less than 6 years	22	27.5%
	to 15 years 6	26	32.5%
	More than 15 years	32	40%

### 8. Study Instrument

#### 8.1. Instrument Description:

The Professional Self-Concept Scale by Talbishi (2019) consists of 34 five-point Likert items, distributed across three dimensions of professional self-concept:

- Perceived Self-Concept: 13 items.
- Ideal Self-Concept: 10 items.
- Social Self-Concept: 11 items.

#### 8.2. Psychometric Properties of the Instrument:

To verify the validity of the instrument, it was administered to a pilot sample of 30 nurses from the study population but outside the main sample.

- Validity:
  - Discriminant Validity: Using the extreme groups method, the calculated  $t$ -value was 6.90, which is statistically significant at ( $\alpha=0.01$  \alpha = 0.01  $\alpha=0.01$ ).
  - Internal Consistency Validity: Correlation coefficients between the dimensions and the overall scale score were high.
- Reliability:
  - Using the split-half method, the calculated  $r$ -value was 0.91.
  - Using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability coefficient was 0.92.

#### 8.3. Response Method:

Participants respond to the questionnaire items by marking (X) based on the five proposed options. The weights assigned to the response options were as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

The criterion for evaluating responses based on arithmetic means was as follows:

- From 1 to 2.33: Low level.
- From 2.34 to 3.66: Medium level.
- From 3.67 to 5: High level.

### 9. Statistical Methods

To address the study questions, the following statistical methods were utilized: Arithmetic means; Standard deviations; Percentages; t-test; One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

### 10. Presentation and Discussion of Study Results

After administering the scale to the sample members according to the procedures outlined above, the data were compiled and analyzed statistically. The results were as follows:

**10.1. To answer the first question, which aimed** to identify the level of professional self-concept awareness among public health nurses in the city of Ouargla, the arithmetic mean, standard deviation,

and percentage of respondents' scores on the overall scale were calculated. The following table illustrates these values.

**Table (02): Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and Percentage of Respondents' Scores on the Overall Scale**

Scale	Number of Items	Total Responses	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage	Level
Professional Self-Concept	34	9954	3.71	0.28	74.2%	High

The data presented in Table (02) indicate that the level of professional self-concept among nurses in the city of Ouargla was high, with the overall mean score on the scale reaching **3.71**, a standard deviation of **0.28**, and a percentage of **74.2%**.

The elevated level of professional self-concept among the nurses can be attributed to their willingness to pursue the nursing profession, their solid academic and specialized training, the availability of a suitable work environment, and their presence in a stimulating and encouraging professional setting. This environment is relatively free from pressures, whether from administrative authorities or the patients they deal with. Additionally, their possession and application of professional skills and job requirements at an appropriate level, along with their high self-awareness, contributed to their elevated professional self-concept, which is considered an integral part of their overall self-perception.

This finding aligns with the studies of Al-Shaurfa (2011) and Talbishi (2019). However, it contrasts with the findings of Maarif (2021), which revealed that the level of professional self-concept among the study sample was low.

**10.2. To answer the second question, which states:** What is the ranking of the dimensions of the professional self-concept scale according to the responses of the study sample? arithmetic means, standard deviations, and percentages for each dimension were calculated. The following table illustrates these values.

**Table (03): Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, Percentages, and Rankings of the Dimensions of the Scale**

Dimension	Number of Items	Total Responses	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage	Rank
Perceived Professional Self-Concept	13	3929	3.81	0.23	76.2%	1
Ideal Professional Self-Concept	10	2966	3.78	0.34	75.6%	2
Social Professional Self-Concept	11	3059	3.52	0.29	70.4%	3

The responses of the study sample, as shown in Table (03), indicate that the **Perceived Professional Self-Concept** dimension ranked first, with an arithmetic mean of **3.81**, a standard deviation of **0.23**, and a relative weight of **76.2%**. This was followed by the **Ideal Professional Self-Concept** dimension, with an arithmetic mean of **3.78**, a standard deviation of **0.34**, and a relative weight of **75.6%**. The **Social Professional Self-Concept** dimension ranked last, with an arithmetic mean of **3.52**, a standard deviation of **0.29**, and a relative weight of **70.4%**.

This ranking appears logical and can be explained as follows:

- **Perceived Professional Self-Concept** ranked first because it represents the most accessible dimension for individuals to recognize. It reflects how a person sees themselves in the present, based on their lived experiences and feelings. This self-awareness develops through interactions with others and the environment.
- **Ideal Professional Self-Concept** ranked second as it reflects what an individual aspires to achieve, representing their desired image of themselves in the future. It highlights their motivation to strive for professional ideals, such as becoming a role model for others and achieving higher levels of professional performance.
- **Social Professional Self-Concept** ranked third because a nurse's ability to harmonize and interact with others is more influenced by their awareness of their actual professional self (perceived self-

concept) and their profession’s demands (ideal self-concept). A nurse can only understand their social professional self-concept through the feedback and reactions of others toward their actions and behavior. However, as the social professional self-concept strengthens, it enhances psychological adjustment, as a positive social self-concept fosters psychological balance and stability.

**10.3. To answer the third question, which states:** Are there statistically significant differences in the level of professional self-concept awareness among the study sample attributable to the gender variable?, the t-test for independent samples was used.

**Table (04): Results of the t-test for the Significance of Differences Between the Mean Responses of Male and Female Nurses on the Overall Scale**

	Count	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated <i>t</i> -value	Tabulated <i>t</i> -value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Significance Level
Males	24	121.50	10.67	1.69	2.64	78	Not Significant
Females	56	125.68	8.65				

Table (04) shows that the calculated *t*-value of **1.69** is less than the tabulated *t*-value of **2.64** at a degree of freedom of **78** and a significance level of **0.01**. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean responses of male and female nurses on the scale items.

This result contrasts with the findings of the study by Mwafaq and Younes (2023), which concluded that there were gender-based differences in the level of professional self-efficacy among teachers, favoring females.

The lack of significant differences in the current study can be attributed to the fact that both genders (male and female nurses) underwent the same selection and recruitment criteria, received the same academic and professional training, and work under similar conditions. Additionally, the nursing profession relies on an individual’s self-competence rather than their gender.

**10.4. To answer the fourth question, which states:** Are there statistically significant differences in the level of professional self-concept awareness among the study sample attributable to the variable of professional experience?, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to identify differences between means.

**Table (05): Results of One-Way ANOVA for Differences Between the Mean Responses of the Study Sample Based on Professional Experience**

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square	F-Value	Significance Level
Between Groups	1127.849	2	563.925	1.945	0.145
Within Groups	61748.521	213	289.899		
Total	62876.370	215			

The data presented in the previous table indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the arithmetic means of the study sample's responses attributable to the variable of professional experience. The calculated *F*-value was **1.945**, which is not significant at ( $\alpha=0.01$ ). This finding aligns with the results of Al-Ahmadi (2020) study, which also reported no statistically significant differences in the mean scores of professional self-concept dimensions based on years of experience.

This result suggests that variations in years of experience (less than 6 years, 6 to 15 years, more than 15 years) did not affect the level of professional self-concept awareness among nurses. This finding is logical, as all groups benefit from the same training programs, share similar working conditions, and engage in experience exchange between senior nurses and recent entrants to the profession, supported by ongoing

professional support. Furthermore, the role of technology and advanced tools has contributed to reducing the differences that might otherwise arise from variations in experience.

### **Study Recommendations**

In light of the findings and the theoretical framework related to the topic, the researchers propose the following recommendations:

- Establish objective criteria for the professional selection of nurses.
- Measure the level of professional self-concept for individuals aspiring to join the healthcare sector, particularly in nursing, during recruitment exams or entry into the profession.
- Organize training and guidance sessions aimed at maintaining the current level of professional self-concept and enhancing it for nurses who exhibit deficiencies in this aspect.
- Address all forms of challenges and difficulties associated with the nursing profession.

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