



**BANDIRMA ONYEDİ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SAĞLIK BİLİMLERİ VE ARAŞTIRMALARI**  
**DERGİSİ**  
*BANU Journal of Health Science and Research*

DOI: 10.46413/boneyusbad.1349865

Özgün Araştırma / Original Research

**Determining the Professional Belongings of Midwifery Department Students and Their Opinions about the Present and Future of Midwifery Profession**

*Ebelik Bölümü Öğrencilerinin Mesleki Aidiyetleri ile Ebelik Mesleğinin Bugünü ve Geleceğiyle İlgili Düşüncelerinin Belirlenmesi*

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**Geliş tarihi / Date of receipt:** 25.08.2023

**Kabul tarihi / Date of acceptance:** 21.03.2024

**Atıf / Citation:** Demir, R. (2024). Determining the professional belongings of midwifery department students and their opinions about the present and future of midwifery profession. *BANÜ Sağlık Bilimleri ve Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(1), 182-194. doi: 10.46413/boneyusbad.1349865

**ABSTRACT**

**Aim:** This study was conducted to determine the professional belonging of midwifery department students and their thoughts about the present and future of the midwifery profession.

**Material and Method:** The research is descriptive/cross-sectional and was conducted with 270 students studying in the midwifery department. Descriptive Information Form and Midwifery Affiliation Scale (MAS) was used to collect the data.

**Results:** It was found that the total mean MAS score of the 2nd grade students of the midwifery department was  $76.14 \pm 13.33$ ,  $85.05 \pm 18.16$  for the 3rd grade students and  $97.88 \pm 21.68$  for the 4th grade students; it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the classes in terms of total and sub-dimension mean scores of MAS ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, it has been determined that as the grades in which students study increase, their expectations from midwifery education and profession increase.

**Conclusion:** It was found that as the grades of the students increased, their status of finding the current developments in the midwifery profession sufficient and their optimistic thoughts about the future of the profession decreased, and the professional belonging of the undergraduate education they received increased.

**Keywords:** Belonging, Future, Midwifery, Profession, Student

**ÖZET**

**Amaç:** Bu araştırma; ebelik bölümü öğrencilerinin mesleki aidiyetleri ile ebelik mesleğinin bugünü ve geleceğiyle ilgili düşüncelerinin belirlenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Gereç ve Yöntem:** Araştırma, tanımlayıcı/kesitsel tipte olup, ebelik bölümünde öğrenim gören 270 öğrenci ile yürütülmüştür. Verilerin toplanmasında, Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu ve Ebelik Aidiyet Ölçeği (EAÖ) kullanılmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Çalışmaya katılan ebelik bölümü 2. sınıf öğrencilerinin EAÖ toplam puan ortalamasının  $76.14 \pm 13.33$ , 3. sınıf öğrencilerinin ise  $85.05 \pm 18.16$  ve 4. sınıf öğrencilerinin ise  $97.88 \pm 21.68$  olduğu; sınıflar arasında EAÖ toplam ve alt boyut puan ortalamaları bakımından istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark olduğu bulunmuştur ( $p < 0.05$ ). Ayrıca öğrencilerin öğrenim gördükleri sınıflar arttıkça, ebelik eğitiminden ve mesleğinden beklentilerinin arttığı saptanmıştır.

**Sonuç:** Öğrencilerin öğrenim gördükleri sınıflar arttıkça, ebelik mesleğindeki bugünkü gelişmeleri yeterli bulma durumlarının ve mesleğin geleceği hakkında iyimser düşüncelerinin azaldığı, aldıkları lisans eğitiminin mesleki aidiyetlerini arttırdığı bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Aidiyet, Ebelik, Gelecek, Meslek, Öğrenci



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## INTRODUCTION

A profession is an endeavor based on the knowledge and skills an individual possesses after receiving a specific education, aiming to provide services (Yücel, Ünal, Özdemir, Koyuncu, & Çakmak, 2018). Belongingness is the perception of an individual considering themselves as part of a particular environment and feeling connected to it (Cullen, Sidebotham, Gamble, & Fenwick, 2016). Professional belongingness, on the other hand, is the result of an individual's adoption of their profession, taking ownership of it, making efforts for its development, and performing the profession with enthusiasm (Ay, Keçe, İnci, Alkan, & Acar, 2018; Saadatbakht, Ahmadi, Mehdizadeh Zare Ansar, Azizzade Forouzi, Jahani, 2019). The sense of professional belongingness not only affects a person's professional success and satisfaction but also impacts their ability to perform adequately in their profession. As a result, it can have negative effects on their family and social life (Yurtsal et al., 2014; Aktürk, Kızılkaya, Çelik, & Yılmaz, 2021; Gümüşdaş, Lazoğlu, & Apay, 2021). Midwives, who play an important role in maintaining and preserving public health, develop their sense of belongingness to their profession during midwifery education (Yücel et al., 2018). Professional belongingness is influenced by various factors such as salary, management style, policies, procedures, personal characteristics, professional status, working conditions and colleagues, societal perspectives, social and cultural communication skills, and career opportunities (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016). It is noted that the increased health and well-being levels of societies are significantly influenced by the professional belongingness of their healthcare professionals. Therefore, enhancing the professional belongingness of healthcare professionals will indirectly lead to a gain that affects the entire community (Toker, Turan, & Seçkin, 2020; Altıparmak, Yılmaz, & Aksoy, 2021). Midwifery is a professional occupation based on evolving scientific, artistic, and ethical values. The acceptance and enthusiastic performance of the midwifery profession by midwives who fulfill their duties, their efforts to uphold and sustain the requirements of the profession while being aware of them, are indicators of their belongingness to the midwifery profession. Due to reasons such as the challenging working conditions and demanding nature of the midwifery profession, it is necessary for

midwives to have high levels of professional belongingness (Saadatbakht et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2020).

In this context, comprehensive studies are needed to identify belongingness in the midwifery profession, reveal factors that hinder professional belongingness, and implement measures to enhance it (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016; Baskaya, Saymer, & Filiz, 2020). Existing studies mainly evaluate the professional belongingness of midwives who have entered the workforce, and there is a lack of sufficient studies focusing on students. It is crucial to determine the level of professional belongingness among midwifery students receiving undergraduate education and preparing to embark on their professional careers, as well as to conduct studies to develop their sense of belongingness (Ashktorab, Hasanvand, Seyedfatemi, Salmani, & Hosseini, 2017). Establishing professional belongingness during the student period will contribute to both professional and personal development, enabling midwifery students to provide quality service to society and women (Gümüşdaş et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2020)

Alongside professional education, students begin to identify their expectations and thoughts about their profession. Professional expectations and thoughts can be influenced by various factors, such as willingly choosing the profession and adopting it, as well as the attitudes of professionals and the status of the profession in society (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016; Saadatbakht et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential to determine how students perceive their profession, their perspectives on the profession, and their thoughts about its current and future state, especially in the early stages of entering the profession (Yücel et al., 2018; Altıparmak et al., 2021). Assessing the attitudes of midwifery students, who will become crucial members of a strong healthcare team in the future, and evaluating their thoughts on the profession is important from this perspective (Pinar et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2020). Existing studies predominantly evaluate the professional affiliations of midwives participating in the workforce, and there are not enough studies focusing on the professional affiliations of midwifery students and their thoughts about the present and future of the midwifery profession. Additionally, determining the thoughts of midwifery students about their profession is considered to be helpful in improving the quality of healthcare services, identifying and resolving

professional issues. This study was conducted to determine the professional belongingness of midwifery students and their thoughts on the present and future of the midwifery profession.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Type

This descriptive/cross-sectional study was conducted between March 15 and July 2023.

### Study Population and Sample

The research was conducted at a state university's midwifery department in Türkiye, between March and June 2023. The population of the study consisted of students (2nd grade= 100, 3rd grade= 87, and 4th grade= 83) enrolled in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades of the midwifery department. The study was completed with the participation of all 270 students without sampling (n= 270). The students' descriptions were obtained in the study. The criteria for inclusion in the study are being a 2nd, 3rd and 4th year student at the midwifery department of this university, being an active student, attending classes, being willing and volunteer to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria from the study include having an obstacle to participating in the research, having a diagnosed psychiatric disease, having a communication barrier, and students who do not continue their education and training (freeze their registration). 1st grade students were excluded from the research, considering that their professional belongingness might not have fully developed.

### Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were collected through an online platform using a "Descriptive Information Form and Midwifery Affiliation Scale (MAS). The data collection forms were sent as links to the WhatsApp groups of all midwifery students by the researcher. Students who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate were requested to complete the questions in the link after reading the purpose of the study and checking the box indicating their consent.

**Descriptive Information Form:** The form, developed by the researcher in line with the literature (Yücel et al., 2018; Ashktorab et al., 2017; St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017; Çevik, & Alan, 2021; Demir Yıldırım et al., 2022) consists of two sections and a total of 27 questions. The first section of the form includes

18 questions regarding students' socio-demographic characteristics and career preferences, while the second section contains nine questions regarding students' professional thoughts. The form was pilot-tested with ten students, and no changes were made to the form after evaluating its comprehensibility and applicability. These students were included in the study.

**Midwifery Affiliation Scale (MAS):** Developed by Başkaya et al. (2018), the Scale consists of 22 items and four factors: Emotional Belongingness, Fulfillment of Professional Roles and Responsibilities, Evaluation of Professional Development and Opportunities, and Professional Duties and Authority Limit. The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale, and the scores range from 22 to 110. A higher score indicates increased professional belongingness. In Başkaya et al. (2018) study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90, while in this study, it was found to be 0.88.

### Ethical Considerations

The study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Graduate Education Institute (Date: 09.03.2023, and Approval No: 03/67) and institutional permission from the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Permission was also obtained via email from Başkaya for the use of the MAS.

### Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 24.0) software was used for data analysis. The normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. One-way ANOVA and Bonferroni post hoc tests were used for comparisons among three or more groups showing normal distribution, and the Kruskal-Wallis test and Bonferroni-Dunn post hoc test were used for comparisons among three or more groups not showing normal distribution. The answers to the open-ended questions categorizing the results were compared using chi-square analysis. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The average age of the participating 2nd grade midwifery students was  $20.68 \pm 3.21$  (min:19-max:23), for 3rd grade students it was  $21.54 \pm 3.61$  (min:20-max:25), and for 4th grade students

it was  $22.39 \pm 5.34$  (min:21-max:25). It was determined that 48% of the 2nd grade midwifery students, 44% of the 3rd grade students, and 46% of the 4th grade students chose this profession voluntarily. The main reasons for choosing the midwifery program among all midwifery students were job prospects (21.6%, 21.1%, and 21%, respectively) and not wanting to retake the entrance exam (20.5%, 19.7%, and 20.2%, respectively). Among the students who selected the midwifery program as one of their top 5 choices, the percentages were 25% for the 2nd grade students, 19.5% for the 3rd grade students, and 25.3% for the 4th grade students. It was found that 76% of the 2nd grade students, 57.5% of the 3rd grade students, and 38.5% of the 4th grade students had sufficient knowledge about the midwifery profession when making their choices. Among the 2nd grade students, 40.5% experienced the most joy when being admitted to the midwifery program, while for the 3rd grade students, it was 47.3%, and for the 4th grade students, it was 42.3%. The satisfaction rates with receiving education in the midwifery program were 87% for the 2nd grade students, 83.8% for the 3rd grade students, and 89.1% for the 4th grade students. Furthermore, 70% of the 2nd grade students, 72.1% of the 3rd grade students, and 48.2% of the 4th grade students would recommend studying midwifery to others. If given the opportunity to choose again, 78% of the 2nd grade students, 72.4% of the 3rd grade students, and 60.2% of the 4th grade students would choose midwifery as their profession. Among all the students, the most desired career paths after graduation were becoming a midwife in a hospital/family health center (33%, 29.3%, and 32.2%, respectively) or becoming a managerial midwife (22.8%, 19.6%, and 16.6%, respectively).

Significant differences were found among the students in terms of their knowledge about the profession when making their choices, their willingness to recommend studying midwifery to others, and their desire to choose midwifery again. It was determined that 2nd grade students had more knowledge about the midwifery profession when making their choices, were more likely to recommend studying midwifery to others, and had lower expectations from future midwifery education and the profession itself. As the academic grades progressed, students'

knowledge about the profession, their willingness to recommend it to others, and their expectations from midwifery education increased ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 1).

When it comes to the perception of current developments in the midwifery profession, 23% of the 2nd grade students, 46% of the 3rd grade students, and 38.6% of the 4th grade students believed that current developments in the profession were inadequate. The main reasons cited by 2nd and 3rd grade students for the inadequacy of developments were the lack of emphasis on professional development by midwives (20% and 19.3%, respectively), while 4th grade students mentioned the inadequate legal rights of the profession (20.6%). Furthermore, 2nd and 3rd grade students perceived ample job opportunities in the midwifery profession (17.2% and 15.8%, respectively), while 4th grade students highlighted the challenging working conditions (14.1%). Overall, the students identified the most significant issue in the midwifery profession as the challenging working conditions (15.4%, 13.9%, and 14.2%, respectively). There was a statistically significant difference among the students' thoughts about current developments in the midwifery profession, with 2nd grade students considering the developments more adequate. As the academic years progressed, students found the developments in the profession to be increasingly inadequate ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

Regarding their perception of the future of the midwifery profession, 66% of the 2nd grade students, 48.2% of the 3rd grade students, and 44.5% of the 4th grade students expressed optimism. Among the 2nd grade students, the majority believed that the profession would receive the necessary value from society (28.1%), while the 3rd and 4th grade students expected improvements in the quality of education (23.6% and 23.8%, respectively). Additionally, 77% of the 2nd grade students, 51.7% of the 3rd grade students, and 49.3% of the 4th grade students had no expectations from future midwifery education. The main expectations among the 2nd and 4th grade students were reducing the number of students in schools (22.6% and 13.1%, respectively), while the 3rd grade students wanted improvements in the quality of education (14.8%).

**Table 1. Some Characteristics Related to the Career Choices of Midwifery Department Students**

Characteristics		2nd grade (n=100)	3rd grade (n=87)	4th grade (n=83)	Test value/p
<b>Age</b>	Mean ± SD***	20.68 ±	21.54 ±	22.39 ±	F=1.365 p=0.079
	Min-Max	3.21	3.61	5.34	
		19-23	20-25	21-25	
		<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	
<b>Decision-making about career choice*</b>	Self-decision	48 (39.1)	44 (36.1)	41 (29.7)	$\chi^2 = 0.628$ p=0.113
	Family's recommendation	33 (26.8)	39 (31.9)	46 (33.3)	
	Teachers' recommendation	31 (25.2)	25 (20.5)	33 (23.9)	
	Friends' recommendation	11 (8.9)	14 (11.5)	18 (13.1)	
<b>Reasons for choosing the midwifery department*</b>	Suggestion from others	64 (17.3)	71 (19.7)	65 (16.8)	$\chi^2 = 6.82$ p=0.304
	Job availability	80 (21.6)	76 (21.1)	81 (21.0)	
	Not wanting to retake the exam	76 (20.5)	72 (19.7)	78 (20.2)	
	Scoring enough for this department	71 (19.1)	65 (18.1)	69 (17.9)	
	Interest in the profession	5 (1.3)	6 (1.7)	10 (2.6)	
	Believing to have the ability for the profession	12 (3.2)	16 (4.4)	19 (4.9)	
	Perceiving midwifery as a respected profession	55 (14.8)	49 (13.6)	60 (15.5)	
	Good economic income	8 (2.2)	6 (1.7)	4 (1.1)	
<b>Preference order of the midwifery department</b>	1st-5th choice	25 (25.0)	17 (19.5)	21 (25.3)	$\chi^2 = 1.536$ p=0.093
	6th-10th choice	28 (28.0)	29 (33.3)	30 (36.2)	
	11th and above	47 (47.0)	41 (47.2)	32 (38.5)	
<b>Having sufficient information about the midwifery profession when making choices</b>	Sufficient information	76 (76.0)	50 (57.5)	32 (38.5)	$\chi^2 = 5.784$ p=0.012*
	Insufficient information	24 (24.0)	37 (42.5)	51 (61.5)	
<b>Feelings experienced when gaining admission to the midwifery department</b>	Joy	62 (40.5)	69 (47.3)	58 (42.3)	$\chi^2 = 7.091$ p=0.072
	Sadness	23 (15.1)	21 (14.3)	26 (19.0)	
	Surprise	24 (15.7)	19 (13.1)	20 (14.5)	
	Confusion	31 (20.2)	28 (19.2)	22 (16.1)	
	No feeling	13 (8.5)	9 (6.1)	11 (8.1)	
<b>Satisfaction with studying in the midwifery department</b>	Satisfied	87 (87.0)	72 (83.8)	74 (89.1)	$\chi^2 = 1.425$ p=0.072
	Not satisfied	13 (13.0)	15 (17.2)	9 (10.9)	
<b>Recommendation of studying in the midwifery department to others</b>	Yes	70 (70.0)	54 (72.1)	40 (48.2)	$\chi^2 = 4.084$ p=0.021*
	No	30 (50.0)	33 (37.9)	43 (51.8)	
<b>If given the opportunity to choose a profession again, choosing midwifery</b>	Yes	78 (78.0)	63 (72.4)	50 (60.2)	$\chi^2 = 16.312$ p=0.044*
	No	22 (22.0)	24 (27.6)	33 (39.8)	
<b>Desired activities after graduation*</b>	Working as a midwife in a hospital/family health center	55 (33.0)	60 (29.3)	58 (32.2)	$\chi^2 = 7.413$ p=0.148
	Becoming a managerial midwife	38 (22.8)	40 (19.6)	30 (16.6)	
	Becoming an academician	24 (14.1)	32 (15.6)	22 (12.3)	
	Working in a different field	10 (6.0)	18 (8.7)	18 (10.0)	
	Becoming a specialist midwife	28 (16.9)	36 (17.6)	30 (16.6)	
	Working as a midwife abroad	12 (7.2)	19 (9.2)	22 (12.3)	

\*Multiple options were marked, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*Standart deviation, F: Oneway ANOVA,  $\chi^2$ : Pearson Chi-square, Freeman-Halton Fisher's Exact Chi-Square test

**Table 2. Thoughts of Midwifery Department Students about the Present Situation of the Midwifery Profession**

Thoughts		2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Test value/ p
		(n=100) n (%)	(n=87) n (%)	(n=83) n (%)	
<b>Current developments in the midwifery profession</b>	Adequate	45 (45.0)	30 (34.5)	22 (26.5)	$\chi^2=9,124$ p=0.023**
	Partially adequate	22 (22.0)	17 (19.5)	29 (34.9)	
	Inadequate	23 (23.0)	32 (38.6)	40 (46.0)	
<b>Reasons for inadequacy of current developments in the midwifery profession*</b>	Insufficient legal rights of the profession	22 (11.6)	32 (14.6)	48 (20.6)	$\chi^2=6.516$ p=0.142
	Insufficient organizational awareness in midwives	18 (9.5)	20 (9.2)	42 (17.9)	
	Low quality of midwifery education	32 (16.8)	24 (11.0)	32 (13.6)	
	Employment of midwives in different areas	36 (18.9)	26 (11.9)	22 (9.6)	
	Failure of midwives to defend their rights	30 (15.8)	34 (15.6)	25 (10.6)	
	Association etc. inadequate functioning of institutions.	14 (7.4)	40 (18.4)	29 (12.4)	
	Midwives do not care about the development of their profession	38 (20.0)	42 (19.3)	36 (15.3)	
<b>Thoughts about the current status of the midwifery profession*</b>	Abundant job opportunities	44 (17.2)	38 (15.8)	35 (13.7)	$\chi^2=4.281$ p=0.129
	Significant role in the development of public health	18 (7.1)	21 (8.7)	20 (7.8)	
	High status	20 (7.8)	25 (10.4)	26 (10.2)	
	Good economic opportunities	25 (9.8)	26 (10.7)	30 (11.7)	
	Challenging/Exhausting working conditions	27 (10.6)	24 (10.0)	36 (14.1)	
	Perceived as a profession solely related to childbirth by society	30 (11.8)	35 (14.5)	32 (12.5)	
	Considered to be similar to nursing by society	35 (13.7)	30 (12.5)	23 (9.2)	
	Recognized and valued by society	36 (14.1)	18 (7.4)	26 (10.2)	
	Regarded as a sacred profession by society	20 (7.8)	24 (10.0)	27 (10.6)	
<b>Thoughts on the current problems of the midwifery profession*</b>	Assignment problem	12 (5.8)	15 (6.3)	21 (7.7)	$\chi^2=2.462$ p=0.215
	Difficulties in working conditions	32 (15.4)	33 (13.9)	38 (14.2)	
	Society's negative view of midwifery	16 (7.6)	18 (7.6)	24 (8.9)	
	Few associations and organizations protecting midwifery	24 (11.4)	26 (11.1)	33 (12.2)	
	Lack of authority and responsibilities of midwives in organizations	28 (13.4)	25 (10.6)	27 (10.0)	
	Employment of midwives in different areas	18 (8.6)	22 (9.4)	30 (11.1)	
	Lack of specialization in the profession	15 (7.2)	16 (6.8)	17 (6.3)	
	Status uncertainty within the team	14 (6.7)	17 (7.3)	26 (9.6)	
	Not doing the job lovingly	22 (10.5)	24 (10.2)	30 (11.1)	
	Low quality of midwifery education	28 (13.4)	30 (12.8)	24 (8.9)	

\*Multiple options were marked, \*\*p<0.05,  $\chi^2$ : Pearson Chi-square, Freeman-Halton Fisher's Exact Chi-Square test

**Table 3. Thoughts of Midwifery Department Students about the Future of the Midwifery Profession**

Thoughts		2nd grade (n=100)	3rd grade (n=87)	4th grade (n=83)	Test value/ p
<b>Thoughts about the future of the profession</b>	Optimistic	66 (66.0)	42 (48.2)	37 (44.5)	$\chi^2=8.904$ p=0.011**
	Pessimistic	12 (12.0)	26 (29.9)	31 (37.4)	
	Neither optimistic nor pessimistic	22 (22.0)	19(21.9)	15 (18.1)	
<b>Thoughts about the future of the midwifery profession*</b>	Thinking that it will receive the value required by society	55 (28.1)	32 (19.9)	43 (21.5)	$\chi^2=4.621$ p=0.253
	Thinking that the status of my profession will improve in the future	34 (17.3)	28 (17.4)	36 (18.2)	
	Thinking that the economic conditions of the profession will be improved	35 (17.8)	27 (16.8)	30 (15.2)	
	Thinking that the legal rights of the profession will improve	48 (24.5)	38 (23.6)	41 (21.3)	
	Thinking that midwifery will become an indispensable profession	24 (12.3)	36 (22.3)	47 (23.8)	
<b>Expectations from midwifery education in the future*</b>	Establishment of midwifery faculties	12 (3.5)	14 (3.9)	18 (4.3)	$\chi^2=7.335$ p=0.032**
	Improvement in the quality of education	38 (11.3)	52 (14.8)	49 (11.7)	
	Increase in the number of academic midwives	22 (6.5)	35 (9.9)	40 (9.5)	
	Correction of school facilities	40 (11.9)	46 (13.1)	46 (11.1)	
	Increase in the number of postgraduate and doctoral programs	24 (7.2)	36 (10.2)	42 (10.1)	
	Reduction of the number of students in schools	76 (22.6)	62 (17.5)	55 (13.1)	
	Increase in programs such as Erasmus, Farabi, Mevlâna	32 (9.4)	23 (6.6)	46 (11.1)	
	Establishment of simulation laboratories	20 (5.9)	18 (5.1)	40 (9.5)	
	Increase in the number of practical applications and internships in courses	35 (10.4)	40 (11.3)	37 (8.8)	
	Provision of better education to students during internships	38 (11.3)	27 (7.7)	45 (10.8)	
I have no expectations from midwifery education in the future	77 (77.0)	45 (51.7)	41 (49.3)		
<b>Expectations from the midwifery profession in the future*</b>	Improvement of working conditions	21 (7.1)	32 (11.6)	48 (18.2)	$\chi^2=8.582$ p=0.048**
	Increase in the number of expert midwives in the field	28 (9.5)	38 (13.7)	27 (10.2)	
	Having a midwife as a manager for midwives in all hospitals	33 (11.3)	15 (5,4)	18 (6.8)	
	Perception of the profession as a more respected occupation in society	46 (15.7)	35 (12,6)	30 (11.2)	
	Increase in the status and recognition of the profession	19 (6.6)	32 (11,6)	26 (9.8)	
	Not experiencing difficulties in appointment in the future	35 (11.9)	28 (10,1)	25 (9.3)	
	Clear definition of work areas	38 (13.2)	40 (14,5)	26 (9.8)	
	Job satisfaction	42 (14.4)	35 (12,6)	21 (7.8)	
	Parallel development of the midwifery profession in our country with the global progress of midwifery	30 (10.3)	22 (7,9)	45 (16.9)	
I have no expectations from the future of the midwifery profession	72 (72.0)	42 (50,6)	38 (43.6)		
<b>Thoughts on the problems that the midwifery profession will face in the future*</b>	Appointment problem	36 (13.3)	42 (11.8)	48 (13.5)	$\chi^2=4.265$ p=0.375
	Difficulties in working conditions	43 (15.8)	52 (14.6)	56 (15.6)	
	Working in different fields	25 (9.2)	32 (8.9)	26 (7.3)	
	Uncertainty of status	16 (5.9)	25 (6.9)	22 (6.2)	
	Not enjoying the profession	30 (10.9)	39 (10.8)	33 (9.2)	
	Negative perception of midwifery by society	28 (10.3)	40 (11.2)	35 (9.8)	
	Working in different fields	32 (11.7)	38 (10.6)	46 (12.9)	
	Uncertainty of status within the team	21 (7.6)	35 (9.8)	42 (11.8)	
Not enjoying the profession	42 (15.3)	55 (15.4)	49 (13.7)		

\*Multiple choices were selected, \*\*p<0.05,  $\chi^2$ : Pearson's Chi-square Test, Freeman-Halton Fisher's Exact Chi-Square test

Among the students, 72% of the 2nd grade students, 56% of the 3rd grade students, and 43.6% of the 4th grade students had no expectations from the future of the midwifery profession. The students who had expectations from the profession mainly desired a more prestigious perception of the profession by society (15.7% for 2nd grade students), clear career paths (14.5% for 3rd grade students), and improvements in working conditions (18.2% for 4th grade students). Some students (15.8% of the 2nd grade students, 15.6% of the 4th grade students, and 15.4% of the 3rd grade students) anticipated challenges such as difficult working conditions and lack of passion in the profession. There were significant differences among the students in terms of their thoughts about the future of the profession, their expectations from future midwifery education, and their expectations from the profession itself. Among midwifery students; There is a statistically significant difference in thinking about the future of the profession and expectations from midwifery education and profession in the future. It was found that second year students had more optimistic thoughts about the future of the profession and had less expectations from midwifery education and profession in the future. In addition, as the classes progressed, it was determined that optimistic thoughts about the future of the profession decreased and expectations from midwifery education and profession in the future increased ( $p < 0.05$ ), (Table 3).

The total MAS score of the 2nd year students of the midwifery department is  $76.14 \pm 13.33$ ,  $85.05 \pm 18.16$  for the 3rd year students and  $97.88 \pm 21.68$  for the 4th grade students. The scores of the 2nd grade students in the MAS Emotional Belonging sub-dimension were  $23.63 \pm 4.14$ , the 3rd grade students  $26.48 \pm 3.65$  and the 4th grade students  $32.48 \pm 5.64$ ; It was determined that the 2nd grade students got  $24.93 \pm 2.45$  points from the Professional Role and Responsibility sub-dimension,  $27.45 \pm 1.17$  for the 3rd year students and  $27.45 \pm 1.17$  for the 4th grade students. Moreover; the scores of the 2nd grade students in the Professional Development and Opportunities sub-dimension were  $17.23 \pm 3.06$ ,  $19.52 \pm 5.32$  for the 3rd grade students and  $22.52 \pm 5.25$  for the 4th grade students; It was determined that the 2nd grade students' Occupational Duty and Limits of Authority sub-dimensions mean score was  $10.35 \pm 3.68$ , 3rd grade students  $11.60 \pm 8.02$  and 4th grade students  $12.43 \pm 3.52$ . It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the total and sub-dimension mean scores of midwifery students. It was observed that the second grade midwifery department students had lower mean MAS and sub-dimension scores, and as the grades of the students increased, their total and sub-dimension mean scores increased ( $p < 0.05$ ), (Table 4).

**Table 4. Comparison of the Mean and Sub-Scale Scores of Midwifery Department Students on the MAS**

Items	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Test value / p
	Mean $\pm$ SD Median (Min-Max)	Mean $\pm$ SD Median (Min-Max)	Mean $\pm$ SD Median (Min-Max)	
Emotional Belonging	$23.63 \pm 4.14$ 23 (7-35)	$26.48 \pm 3.65$ 26 (7-35)	$32.48 \pm 5.64$ 32 (7-35)	F=2.881 p=0.021*
Professional Role and Responsibility	$24.93 \pm 2.45$ 24 (7-35)	$27.45 \pm 1.17$ 27 (7-35)	$30.45 \pm 7.27$ 30 (7-35)	F=1.618 p=0.013*
Professional Development and Opportunities	$17.23 \pm 3.06$ 17 (6-25)	$19.52 \pm 5.32$ 19 (5-25)	$22.52 \pm 5.25$ 22 (5-25)	F=0.690 p=0.024*
Professional Duties and Authority Limits	$10.35 \pm 3.68$ 10 (3-15)	$11.60 \pm 8.02$ 11 (3-15)	$12.43 \pm 3.52$ 12 (3-15)	F=0.579 p=0.011*
Total Score	$76.14 \pm 13.33$ 76 (22-110)	$85.05 \pm 18.16$ 85 (22-110)	$97.88 \pm 21.68$ 97 (22-110)	F=0.130 p=0.031*

\* $p < 0.05$ , F: One-way ANOVA

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to determine the professional identity of midwifery students and

their thoughts on the present and future of the midwifery profession. The findings revealed that the majority of the midwifery students who participated in the study made their career choice



based on their own desire and their family's recommendation. The main reasons for selecting this department were found to be job opportunities, not wanting to retake the entrance exam, meeting the required score for this department, and recommendations from others. When the studies related to the topic were examined, it was observed that our findings were similar to the literature, where midwifery students mostly chose their department based on their own and their family's desires (Cullen et al., 2016; Yücel et al., 2018), and the reasons for choosing the midwifery profession included job availability and placement ease (Çevik & Alan, 2021; Amanak, Şeker, & Canbay, 2021), meeting the required score for the department (Cullen et al., 2016; Ay et al., 2018), enjoying the profession (Çevik & Alan, 2021), and desiring to obtain a diploma (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016). It is gratifying to see that both the literature and our study indicate that the majority of students choose the midwifery department based on their own desire, which demonstrates that the profession is accepted by young people and their families, and that students make conscious decisions in their career choices. Choosing a profession willingly can contribute to a person's success in both their student and professional life, embracing and enjoying their profession, enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, and building positive self-esteem. In addition, it is observed that the majority of students choose the midwifery department because their university entrance exam score is sufficient for this department, they have concerns about their future, and they see midwifery as a profession with job security. In recent years, especially with the increase in the number of private hospitals in our country, midwifery graduates have found it easier to find employment, leading to an increase in the employment of healthcare workers (Ay et al., 2018). This rapid development is thought to have directed the attention of both the society and students towards the field of midwifery.

It was determined that the students who participated in the study mostly chose the midwifery department as their tenth or higher preference, and 2nd grade students had more sufficient knowledge about the profession when making their choices. Similar studies in the literature indicate that midwifery departments are not among the top preferences during university application periods (Canbay et al., 2020; Demir and Taşpınar, 2021) In addition, in a study by

Demir Yıldırım et al. (2022), it was found that there was a statistically significant difference in the knowledge about the profession among first grade (87.1%) and fourth grade (63.5%) midwifery students when making their choices, with the knowledge level decreasing as the years progressed. The results of our study are in line with the literature, and they demonstrate that the preferences for the midwifery department include students who have an inclination and interest in the profession, as well as those who have concerns about their future. It is considered that having more sufficient knowledge about the profession when students start their vocational education is an important parameter for the development of a sense of belonging and being knowledgeable about the profession.

The majority of the midwifery students who participated in the study expressed satisfaction with studying in the midwifery department. It was found that second grade students were most likely to recommend the midwifery department to others and would choose the midwifery profession if they had the opportunity to choose again. However, as the students progressed in their academic years, the tendency to recommend and reselect the midwifery department decreased. It is believed that this result may be due to the fear of working conditions or the possibility of facing difficulties in job placement that students in later years may perceive, as well as their low self-efficacy perception. The findings of the study are consistent with the literature, where it is reported that the majority of midwifery students are satisfied with their department, express their willingness to choose the profession again, and would recommend it to others (Hildingsson & Fenwick, 2015; Atasoy & Ermin, 2016; Evans et al., 2020). The satisfaction of students with studying in the midwifery department is considered important for their success and professional identity in both their student and professional lives.

In the study, it was found that the majority of students in all classes expressed their desire to become midwives in hospitals or family health centers after graduation. Additionally, there was a majority of students who expressed their interest in becoming managerial or specialist midwives. This finding is consistent with the literature, where studies conducted by Demir & Taşpınar (2021), Canbay, Çitil, & Özcan, (2020), Yücel et al. (2018), and Atasoy & Ermin (2016) also reported that students mostly aspire to work in settings such

as family health centers, hospitals, and the obstetrics and gynecology departments of hospitals after graduation. Furthermore, Yücel, Tuna, & Yüksel (2017) found that the majority of midwifery students aspire to build a career and become academics after graduation. We believe that the students' preference for working in hospitals and family health centers, where they can find employment more easily and gain economic independence without wasting time, may be influenced by factors such as their perception of having acquired the necessary skills during their education and their desire to actively practice their independent roles in the field of midwifery. It is also encouraging to consider that students want to work in settings where they can effectively apply their knowledge and skills related to midwifery practice. The opportunity for students to gain practical experience and familiarize themselves with various healthcare institutions at each stage of their education may have played a role in shaping their preferences.

As students became more knowledgeable about the profession and its developments, it can be observed that their belief in the inadequacy of the midwifery profession's progress increased. Through their education, students had the opportunity to become acquainted with the midwifery profession and its challenges. The literature also supports the presence of students and professionals in the midwifery field who perceive the profession's development as inadequate, and the barriers to professional development identified in our study align with those found in the literature (Hildingsson & Fenwick, 2015; Bogren, Berg, Edgren, van Teijlingen, Wigert, 2016). Indeed, the literature points out obstacles to the profession's progress, such as midwives being assigned to areas specific to nursing, low levels of education among midwives, a lack of organizations/associations advocating for midwives and the profession, and insufficient unity and organizational awareness among midwives (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016; Patterson, Macznik, Miller, Kerkin, & Baddock, 2018; Evans et al., 2020). It is encouraging that students are aware of the factors that hinder the development of the midwifery profession, as it indicates the emergence of more conscious midwives who are contributing to the professionalization of midwifery.

Having positive thoughts about the profession is important for adapting to the profession, developing professional identity, and maintaining

a productive work life (Gümüldaş et al., 2021). When asked about their thoughts on the current state of the midwifery profession, the students in the midwifery department expressed the most common thoughts about the profession's current state as having ample job opportunities, being a profession recognized by society and not just perceived as being involved in childbirth, and having challenging and demanding working conditions. These results indicate that students are not only positive about the current state of their profession but also aware of the difficulties and problems it entails. In fact, the students participating in the study believe that the main problems in their profession include challenging working conditions, low quality of midwifery education, limited authority and responsibilities of midwives in institutions, and a scarcity of organizations that protect and support midwifery. These findings are consistent with the literature (Yücel et al., 2017; Çakır Koçak, Öztürk Can, Yücel, Demirelöz Akyüz, Çeber Turfan, 2017; Demir & Taşpınar, 2021). It is necessary for both professionals and associations to identify and address these problems in order to remove the barriers in the field of midwifery. Additionally, the positive developments in the field of midwifery today are believed to positively influence the perceptions of both the society and the students regarding the current state of the profession.

It was determined that the 2nd grade students participating in the study were more optimistic about the future of the midwifery profession compared to students in other grades. Among all the students, the most common beliefs about the future of the midwifery profession were that it would receive the necessary recognition from society, that the legal rights of the profession would improve, and that midwifery would be an indispensable profession. It is important for students in the midwifery department to develop a positive perspective towards their profession and to have optimistic thoughts about its future (Patterson, Macznik, Miller, Kerkin, & Baddock, 2018). Considering that 2nd grade students in the midwifery department find the current developments in the profession more satisfactory and have more knowledge about the profession when making their career choices, it can be said that these factors influence their optimistic views about the future of the midwifery profession. In addition, it is thought that the profession-specific courses taken by second-year students in the elective courses they take and the courses taught

for professional development may be effective in this result.

In the study, it was determined that the expectations of 2nd grade students regarding midwifery education and profession were relatively lower, and as the grades progressed, students' expectations increased. Students who had expectations from midwifery education mostly expressed their hopes for reducing the number of students in schools, improving the physical conditions of the educational institutions, and enhancing the quality of education. Students who had expectations from the midwifery profession mostly expressed their desires for midwifery to be perceived as a more respected profession in society, deriving satisfaction from the profession, having clear job opportunities, increasing the number of expert midwives in the field, and improving working conditions. In the literature, it has been reported that students generally expect the quality of midwifery education to improve in the future (Atasoy & Ermin, 2016; Bogren et al., 2016), with newly graduated midwives being more equipped and educated compared to current midwives (Demir ve Taşpınar, 2021). Additionally, they expect better job prospects and believe that the status of the midwifery profession will be better and become indispensable. They also express expectations such as an increase in the number of academic staff with a midwifery background in schools, more training for expert midwives, having midwife managers in all hospitals, and improving working conditions (Çakır Koçak et al., 2017; Canbay et al., 2020). Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that as the grades progress, students' expectations for their professional future increase, and as they approach graduation, they become more aware of professional issues and have higher expectations for their future. Furthermore, it is necessary to address students' dissatisfaction with the physical conditions and educational quality of their schools by improving the physical facilities and planning student numbers based on the capabilities, physical conditions of the schools, and the number of teaching staff.

The students expressed their thoughts mainly on the challenges in working conditions and the lack of passion for the profession as the future problems that the midwifery profession will face. In the conducted studies, students identified the lack of passion for the profession, inadequate leave despite the demanding working conditions, the absence of specialization within the

profession, insufficient salary, negative societal perception towards midwifery, negative attitudes of practicing midwives, lack of recognition or prejudice from society towards midwives, and limited authority and responsibilities of midwives as the major concerns they anticipate for the future (Bogren et al., 2016; Canbay et al., 2020). These findings indicate various issues regarding the midwifery profession, and it shows that students are aware of these problems. It is considered important to facilitate individual interviews to allow students to share their negative feelings towards the chosen profession and to listen to their suggestions for resolving these issues.

When comparing the average scores of the midwifery students in terms of their MAS total and subscale scores, it was determined that the 2nd grade students had lower MAS total and subscale scores compared to other classes. Additionally, as students progressed to higher grades, their MAS total and subscale scores increased, and fourth grade students had the highest MAS total and subscale scores. This finding of our study is consistent with the literature, which suggests that students' professional identity increases as they advance in their studies. In fact, in a study conducted by Ocak Aktürk et al. (2021), it was found that the MAS total score average was higher in the fourth grade, and there was a statistically significant difference between the scale score averages of fourth grade and first grade students. In our study, it can be said that all the students in the included classes had a moderate to high level of professional identity, and the fact that fourth grade students, who are nearing graduation, feel a sense of belonging to the profession is an indicator of this. Identity is a concept that can be important not only for the learning process but also for the transition to working life and the process of professional adaptation in midwifery. Therefore, midwifery students should be evaluated in this regard during their undergraduate education, and initiatives should be taken to increase their sense of belonging. It is important for academics to work on developing a sense of belonging in students to strengthen the midwifery profession. Establishing a sense of belonging in midwifery during the undergraduate period will lay a solid foundation for professional identity and will be reflected in midwifery care as well (Fenwick, Cullen, Gamble, Sidebotham, 2016). It will be the greatest achievement to shape the future of the profession by instilling professional identity from the first

grade of midwifery education and even before graduation. In addition, the presence of midwife academics plays a crucial role in providing education for the development of professional identity. The training of midwifery students by midwife academics will strengthen professional identity and lead to quality and qualified midwifery care after graduation, enabling women in our country to access the quality midwifery care they deserve.

### Limitations of the Study

Since the research was conducted only with students from one university's midwifery department, the findings of the research can only be generalized to the student group of the participating university. It is recommended that the study be conducted with a larger sample group and midwifery department students from different universities.

### CONCLUSION

It has been observed that as midwifery students' academic years progress, their perceptions of current developments in the midwifery profession decrease, their expectations and professional identities towards education and profession increase, and their professional identities strengthen thanks to their undergraduate education. Students mostly stated that their profession has many job opportunities but working conditions are difficult. They expressed their expectations for social recognition, improvement of legal rights, and indispensability of the midwifery profession for the future of the profession. Since midwifery students will play an important role in meeting healthcare demands, it is important to evaluate their thoughts about the present and future of the profession. It is believed that such evaluations will contribute to increasing professional satisfaction, improving the quality of healthcare, identifying and resolving professional difficulties. It is recommended to conduct more comprehensive research on the factors affecting students' professional identity levels, to investigate students' expectations and thoughts through qualitative studies in different midwifery schools, and to make improvements according to these expectations.

### Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Graduate Education Institute Ethics Committee (Date:

09.03.2023, and Approval No: 03/67).

### Author Contributions

Idea/Concept: R.D.; Design: R.D.; Supervision/Consulting: R.D.; Analysis and/or Interpretation: R.D.; Literature Search: R.D.; Writing the Article: R.D.; Critical Review: R.D.

### Peer-review

Externally peer-reviewed.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

### Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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