

# Impact Of Stress On Nursing Students

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*Abstract: Nursing students are prone to stress due to the transitional nature of college life. High levels of stress are believed to affect student's health and academic functions. Students are subjected to different kinds of stressors such as the pressure of academics with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties of integrating into the system. Thus, they are exposed to stress leading to its effects their life and also may compromise learning during these due to stress reactions. Methods to reduce student stress often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Stress refers to a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. In this interaction, demands, limitations and opportunities related to work may be perceived as threatening to surpass the individual's resources and skills. Stress is any physical or psychological stimulus that disturbs the adaptive state and provoked a coping response

The increasing interest in stress research is probably because we live in a world that includes many stressful circumstances and stress has been a global phenomenon. It has become an integral part of life and is said to be the price we all pay for the struggle to stay alive. According to the American Academy of Family physicians, two-thirds of visits to family doctors are for stress related problems. Stress is inevitable to human and reactions are varied from individual to individual. It depends on their coping abilities from varied life situations.

Nursing students are prone to stress due to the transitional nature of college life. High levels of stress are believed to affect health and academic functions. Students are subjected to different kinds of stressors such as the pressure of educational curriculum with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties of integrating into the system. Stressors may be found in personal relationships, health issues, financial aspects, and with personal Expectations.

Most of the literature on stress consistently address the fact that life changes or transition can predispose a person to stress and both negative and positive events in our lives such

as failing in an examination, having problems with roommates, illness among the family member, getting married or divorced, getting promoted or terminated, moving to a new locality or going to the university can produce stress. Life changes, daily hassles, home life and acculturation - the process of adapting and becoming integrated with a new cultural environment, therefore have been identified as sources of stress.

Another study showed that "one third" of nursing students experience severe stress that induce mental health problems such as anxiety and/or depression. A study comparing the stress levels of various professional students found that nursing students experience higher levels of stress than medical, social work and pharmacy students. However, levels of stress are higher, and there are a greater number of sources of stress among health professionals, especially nurses, with negative consequences for their health

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that stress-related disorders will be one of the leading causes of disability by the year 2020. Nursing schools are now recognized as stressful environment that often exert a negative effect on the academic performances and psychological well-being of the students. Studies from the United Kingdom and India have shown increasing levels of stress among nursing students.

## STRESSORS

During nursing education and training, nursing students are frequently exposed to various stressors which may directly or indirectly impede their learning and performance. The nature of clinical education presents challenges that may cause students to experience stress. Moreover, the practical components of the program which is important in preparing students to develop into professional nurse role by its nature have made the programme even more stressful than other programmes.

The various factors associated with stress among nursing students:

- ✓ **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:** Perceived stress due to change in living environment, inadequate telephone facilities, inadequate provision of safety and security in the world, inadequate facility of canteen/mess, lack of recreational facilities.
- ✓ **INTRAPERSONAL FACTORS:** Change in eating pattern, engagement/marriage, homesickness in hostel, change in sleeping pattern, new responsibilities of life, personal preoccupations, parents expectations, decline in personal health, death of significant one, financial problems, change in religious beliefs
- ✓ **ACADEMIC FACTORS:** Less vacations/breaks, Inability to balance study and leisure time, over burden with study, inability to concentrate on study, poor satisfaction with class room performance, getting lower grade than anticipated, inability to enjoy study and class presentations, difficulty to understand language used by teachers while teaching, poor interest in studies, poor Inter Personal Relationship with teachers, serious argument with teachers, practical work, missing too many classes. Students experience increased tension prior to their clinical rotation and written examination especially their final examination.
- ✓ **CLINICAL FACTORS:** They also experience stress in clinical area; pressure in procedure performance, fear of committing a mistake, time pressure, dealing with different and difficult patients. Lack of experience, fear of making mistakes, discomfort at being evaluated by faculty members, worrying about giving patients the wrong information or medication and concern about possibly harming a patient are just a few of the stressors for student nurse.
- ✓ **INTERPERSONAL FACTORS:** change in social activities, fight with close ones, lack of cooperation from friends, lack of close and intimate friends, conflict with roommates. Social factors can also encompass the fear of public speaking, confrontations, and dealing with authority figures.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Furthermore, stress could result to deleterious symptoms such as alcoholism and drug dependence, eating disorder, indiscriminate use of illegal substances, sleep disorder, suicide, absenteeism, mental health disorders, and even psychological symptoms. Thus, the undergraduate nurses is considered as one of the most sensitive period in their lifespan

since learning during these years may be compromised due to stress reactions produced.

## THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON NURSING STUDENTS INCLUDE

The effects of stress extend beyond physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms as students may experience difficulty in attaining educational goals.

Long-time stress among nursing students or prolonged stress can cause:

- ✓ Memory problems and inability to concentrate in the studies.
- ✓ chest pain,
- ✓ rapid heartbeat,
- ✓ depression or general unhappiness and
- ✓ Sleep disturbance, It may even lead to burnout.

## PHYSICAL

Physical symptoms include:

- ✓ a pounding heart
- ✓ elevated blood pressure
- ✓ Excessive sweat palms
- ✓ Tightness in the chest and pain
- ✓ Pain in the neck, jaw and back muscles
- ✓ Headache
- ✓ Abdominal cramps
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ trembling
- ✓ Tiredness
- ✓ Susceptibility to minor illness
- ✓ itching

## THOUGHTS

- ✓ Lack of attention
- ✓ decreased self esteem and confidence
- ✓ disorganized thoughts
- ✓ diminished sense of meaning in life
- ✓ Lack of control or the need for too much control
- ✓ Negative self statements and negative evaluation
- ✓ Difficulty in making decisions
- ✓ Loss of perspective.

## BEHAVIOURS

- ✓ Withdrawn and not able to socialize
- ✓ Alcohol, nicotine or drugs abuse
- ✓ under eat or over eat
- ✓ Accident prone and careless
- ✓ Impatient, aggressive or compulsive –pacing, fidgeting, swearing, blaming, throwing and hitting!
- ✓ Working longer hours – not taking breaks, take work home, procrastinate with important projects, take the ‘headless chicken’ approach when under pressure, and manage time poorly
- ✓ no longer time for leisure activities.

## FEELINGS

- ✓ Irritable
- ✓ Angry
- ✓ depressed
- ✓ Jealous
- ✓ Restless
- ✓ Anxious
- ✓ Unreal or hyper alert
- ✓ Un necessarily guilty.
- ✓ Panic
- ✓ Mood swings, crying easily.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS

Methods to reduce student stress often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits.

- ✓ **PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT:** Shelton found that psychological support was just as important to student persistence as functional support. Two specific types of support were identified – psychological support, directed at facilitating a sense of competency, self-efficacy, and self-worth and functional support, aimed at the accomplishment of academic tasks. The coping methods adopted were categorized as healthy coping strategies and unhealthy coping strategies. While the students reported use of various methods of coping methods to alleviate stress, the majority of them used positive thinking as a healthy coping, such as, thinking how similar things were handled in the past, talking to parents, praying more than usual (relying on religious faith), use of a step by step approach to solve problem, sharing of problems with friends. The professional support strategies such as "getting professional counselling" and "talking to a teacher or counsellor" and the humorous strategy. Whereas self blame was the common unhealthy coping method. The effectiveness of a stress coping program based on mindfulness meditation approach could be effective in reduction of the stress and anxiety of the nursing students
- ✓ **STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:** A caring, supportive learning environment transforms faculty–student relationship into a collaborative partnership that promotes professional socialization and empowerment.
- ✓ **FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR MANAGING STRESS:** Nursing faculty are positioned to create caring and supportive learning environments that facilitate students' coping and persistence, perceived self- efficacy, and success in nursing.
- ✓ **PEER AND STAFF MENTORSHIPS AND MODELING:** Peer support and personal mentoring can be effective strategies to reduce student anxiety in clinical settings. The support of senior nursing students in the role of mentors, beginning junior nursing students can be guided in patient care assignments within the clinical setting. This relationship fosters confidence as students communicate freely and ask questions without fear of reprisals from nursing instructors. Nursing students

support each other in a student centered, non-threatening learning environment that minimizes the student's anxieties when first entering unfamiliar clinical settings.

- ✓ **CARING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:** creating a caring environment that demonstrates value, respect, and support as a collaborative enterprise between faculty and learners; not only fosters relationships but also promotes learning in a non stressful manner. Caring learning environment is based on genuine dialog, engagement, and reflection. Further, the development of formal and informal support systems with faculty, staff, and peers optimizes academic and social connections and provides essential resources to proactively address stress and positively impact retention and satisfaction. Watson's theory on caring provides a framework for establishing relationships that support academic success, professional evolution, and collegial relationships. A caring learning environment actively engages faculty members and students in learning through mutual respect and genuine presence; this relationship requires a student/faculty partnership, collaboration, commitment, self-direction, and creativity. Engagement of the learner and faculty members as equal partners in the learning environment fosters connections, promotes self-efficacy, and serves to transform participants. This process facilitates meaningful learning opportunities.
- ✓ **FACULTY ROLE AND BEHAVIOR:** Faculty behavior moves into one that embraces teaching moments and "teaches" rather than critically "evaluates" student performance in the clinical setting. Focusing on the teaching role while de-emphasizing the evaluator role is one strategy that can promote an open and supportive learning environment where the instructor is welcomed as a role model and facilitator of learning. This positive learning environment can result in enhanced learning and a collaborative relationship for all involved. The student participants in Del Prato's study identified the teachers' ability to de-emphasize their evaluative role as an important dimension of the supportive learning environment that helped students to overcome feelings of anxiety and stress. Informants explained that supportive teachers recognized when students felt anxious and worked to put them at ease by establishing rapport and communicating words of encouragement. Student participants often verbalized appreciation for these caring teachers who "gave" them confidence and helped them to believe in themselves as future nurses.
- ✓ **REFLECTIVE LEARNING MODEL:** Reflection builds upon sharing one's personal knowledge and experience to better understand the implications of one's care and explore alternatives. Promoting a supportive learning environment can readily become incorporated into the educational experience within the classroom and clinical settings by implementing reflection. This strategy integrates personal knowledge, clinical practice, and faculty–student engagement within a structured learning environment. The reflective learning model allows the student to critically examine one's practice by reflecting on one's interactions and interventions. Bevis and Watson support this and suggest the sharing of one's learning

experiences promotes collaboration, fosters interpersonal relationships, and creates new knowledge.

- ✓ **SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS:** Social support in conjunction with coping strategies and identification of personality styles can lead to effective management of stressors. The provision of academic, social, and behavioral support systems and networks are effective for reducing distress and preventing unhealthy levels of stress. Further, teaching stress identification and stress reduction techniques provides learners with an effective tool for use personally and in the clinical area. Finally, utilization of innovative teaching methodologies and stress reduction interventions in all learning environments can optimize learning while decreasing stress.
- ✓ **EMPOWERING STUDENTS:** One strategy that shows promise for reducing the stress for nursing students is mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR). Mindfulness requires the individual to attend to his/her conscious experience with a detached, objective, and open attitude. As a result, the individual gains insight into the nature and frequency of their thoughts and feelings along with the ability to separate the thought from the feeling and/or behavior, and a more balanced emotional state leading to decreased stress.
- ✓ **PROACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES:** Nursing faculty members can take a proactive approach by providing timely and constructive feedback on assignments, establishing reasonable and purposeful course requirements, exploring innovative strategies for instruction and evaluation of learning, and by preparing students for the clinical experience and supporting them as they administer care. Implementation of traditional and innovative academic strategies can be effective for reducing stress among nursing students. In this regard, numerous interventions have been recommended to support students in the learning environment. Peer and professional tutoring can assist students to master course content, which improves confidence, self-esteem, and satisfaction. Faculty availability, approachability, and fairness have been identified as sources of support and reassurance for students. Informal faculty support has

been identified as being as significant and as effective as that received from family and peers in empowering students to cope with stress.

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