

Factors Causing Stress Among First Year GNM Students Attending a Selected School of Nursing in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview on factors causing stress among first year GNM students attending a selected school of nursing in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: stress, nursing

1. Introduction

Students entering General Nursing Programme usually come from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds, with resultant varying life experiences and educational opportunities, including different expectations, needs and academic potential.

Academic success does not entirely consist of one's application of intellectual capacity. There are many other factors that directly or indirectly affect academic success. These include the transition from secondary school to university, student motivation, study methods, teaching strategies, interaction between students, academic and social systems of the university, cultural expectations, psychosocial factors and lack of finances.

One or more of these factors could lead to stress, which could hinder academic potential by distracting students' focus from their studies. Research has shown that self-concept positively affects the success of nursing students' ability to manage anxiety and stress related to studying. Specifically, if a student is confident in his/her ability and remains motivated, he/she is more likely to succeed academically, resulting in lower dropout rates. Whereas the overwhelming stress associated with test anxiety has a negative relationship with academic achievements, this could lead to a decrease in the academic success of students.

The nursing programme also contains both intensive coursework and practical components at hospitals, which may become overwhelming and stressful with regard to a student's ability to cope with Literature on stress that affects nursing students in small tertiary colleges in the early years of academic study is lacking. The objective of this study was to determine the stressors experienced by first-year nursing students who attended a college of nursing in SA. The study also ascertained the stress-relieving mechanisms used by these students.

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coursework and practical components at hospitals, which may become overwhelming and stressful with regard to a student's ability to cope with examinations. Attrition rates among nursing students remain high, irrespective of attempts by institutions to provide strategies such as selection in line with quality of students, and implementing student mentoring and tutoring. It is unknown whether the stress factors that affect students attending a large university with many different faculties are different from those of students who attend smaller tertiary institutions that train them in one particular course only. In nursing, stress factors related to the clinical learning environment are well documented.

The increased stress of nursing students is due to the simultaneous learning in both academic and clinical areas. This adds to the growing personal stressors experienced by these students. Stress negatively influences students, thus affecting their academic performance and course completion rates. Literature on stress that affects nursing students in small tertiary colleges in the early years of academic study is lacking. The objective of this study was to determine the stressors experienced by first-year nursing students who attended a school of nursing in Kanpur. The study also ascertained the stress-relieving mechanisms used by these students.

2. Methods

A quantitative descriptive survey design was used. Student nurses at a selected school of nursing in Kanpur, who were either in the final stages of completing their first year of study or had done so in the previous semester, formed the target population (N=422) for this study. Using Cochran's formula, a minimum of 128 participants were required for the sample population to achieve significant results at a 95% confidence level. As we anticipated a response rate of ~80%, 232 students were targeted. Five school of nursing from 8 of the 9 campuses that comprise the school of nursing were chosen for the study by a ballot method. The campuses differed only with regard to geographical distribution, which allows for easy access to students from different parts of the Kanpur.

The campus at which the principal investigator lectures, was excluded from the study. The criteria required for inclusion in

the study were: first-year nursing students enrolled for a minimum of 7 months at the school of nursing, who understood the letter of information and signed the consent form. All students at the 5 school of nursing who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the research study. Participation was voluntary and no students were forced into entering the study.

All students were provided with information about the study, both verbally and on an information sheet. Students who agreed to participate after reading the information letter, signed a consent form prior to answering the self-administered questionnaire. A new questionnaire was developed, as an appropriate one was not available for the purposes of this study.

The questionnaire was also used as part of a larger study. It was developed by the researcher from four common themes, in addition to a section on demographic data. The themes included: English as a second language, first-generation students, stressors experienced by students and programme orientation.

There was a total of 55 questions, of which 32 were used for this part of the study. These included simple dichotomous questions for demographics, questions using rating and ranking scales and Likert scale-type questions. A combination of different types of questions increases the reliability and validity of the tool.

Participants were asked to respond to statements about factors that cause stress, by selecting 1 of 5 stress levels in response to each statement. The levels of stress were scored from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (very stressful). Students were also asked to consider statements about factors to relieve stress and indicate their choice according to a Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). After construction of the questionnaire, a focus group discussion was held to ensure validity of the questionnaire. The focus group discussion took place during the departmental research committee meeting, which comprised 6 academics, 5 of whom are also professional nurses and who is not a nurse but a staff member at the Faculty of Health Sciences. This group of experts in nursing and health science education and research was invited to judge each item in the questionnaire for relevance, clarity, simplicity and ambiguity. Items that did not adequately meet these criteria were either removed from the questionnaire or adjusted until acceptable. The post-focus group questionnaire was then piloted for reliability with 5 students who met the inclusion criteria for the study, but who were excluded from the main study. The purpose of the pilot study was to detect flaws, establish usefulness of the questions and, if necessary, amend the questions. The pilot study population indicated that they understood the questions and did not have difficulty in answering them; therefore, no changes were made to the questionnaire.

Data were collected between September and November 2013. An academic not involved in the research distributed the questionnaires and was available in the classroom to answer any

queries that the students might have had. The researcher was available in a nearby room to answer any queries of respondents if necessary. She was not in the classroom, in an effort to prevent students feeling obligated to participate in the study. All participants were required to sign a consent form prior to answering the questionnaire. No students were coerced into participating. Data were analysed on SPSS version 17 (SPSS Inc., USA) by means of frequency distribution of responses and mean scores. To test for significant trends in the data, inferential statistics were applied. These included Pearson's correlation and χ^2 tests. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used for the comparison of non-parametric data. Throughout, $p < 0.05$ was used to indicate significance.

3. Results

The majority were female (70.2%; $n=174$), <26 years of age (69.6%; $n=75$), of black ethnicity (86.7%; $n=215$) and raised in a rural area (61.3%; $n=152$). Although 71% ($n=175$) were raised by their own parents, 22% were raised by extended family members, a social welfare home (4%), a child-headed household (2%) or members of the community (1%). The type of secondary school attended varied significantly between the different participants ($p < 0.001$), with almost half having attended a rural government school (46.4%). Many were the first in their family to attend a tertiary education institution (37.5%; $n=93$). Half of the respondents indicated that they had basic necessities, such as electricity, clean water and adequate food, in their homes (52.4%; $n=130$), but that there was nothing extra available. Only a quarter (23%; $n=57$) always had the basic necessities and a little extra money available. Some did not have any basic necessities (18.5%; $n=46$) and only a few respondents (4.4%; $n=11$) always had everything that they wanted in their homes. For the duration of their nursing studies, all of the respondents had the opportunity to live in a nurses' residence (100%; $n=248$).

Stressors experienced by First-year students. Respondents were asked to consider statements relating to factors that cause stress by selecting 1 of 5 levels in response to each statement. The levels of stress were scored from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (very stressful). The long working hours, financial pressures assignments, difficulty of academic work, poor study methods, family illness and other problems at home caused considerable stress (mean > 3 ; $p < 0.001$). They were also required to contemplate the level of agreement to statements related to factors that may cause stress. These levels of agreement were scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The majority of respondents felt that they did not have enough time for their studies, that they had to work harder than their classmates and that they experienced more stress than their classmates. They also indicated that there was family pressure to pay for necessities at home and that there was insufficient money to pay for textbooks for their studies. Furthermore, stress affected their grades negatively (mean > 3 ; $p < 0.001$).

The transition from secondary school to tertiary education

was difficult. Respondents felt that they did not know what was awaiting them before starting the nursing course ($n=247$; $p<0.001$). They felt that nursing was not what they had expected ($n=246$; $p=0.038$), and had anticipated the nursing programme to be more practical than theoretical ($n=246$; $p<0.001$). Most respondents also expected 'nursing to be an easy practical job' ($n=246$; $p<0.001$). However, the choice of another course at university did not take precedence over the nursing course ($n=246$; $p<0.001$) and they were not studying nursing merely to receive a monthly salary – it was what they wanted to do ($n=246$; $p<0.00$).

4. Stress-relieving mechanisms

A significantly large proportion of respondents played with their cell phones ($p<0.001$) or socialised with their friends ($p<0.001$) to alleviate stress. Eating, consumption of alcohol/partying and staying away from work were not used as stress relievers by most of the participants.

Respondents were asked to use a Likert rating from 1 to 5 to indicate the support that they received from specified sources, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). A mean score was calculated. Most respondents felt that their lecturers (mean 4.17 (standard deviation (SD) 1.27); $n=246$), parents (4.00 (1.52); $n=241$) and friends (fellow nursing students) (3.78 (1.44); $n=246$) were sources of support. To a lesser extent, respondents identified their siblings (3.22 (1.70); $n=245$), friends from school (3.06 (1.61); $n=245$) and close relatives (2.63 (1.63); $n=246$) as sources of support

5. Conclusion

Our findings indicate that in addition to academic commitments, financial pressures and illness that affect the families of students are a major source of stress among first-year nursing students in Kanpur. Students tend to socialise with friends and play with cell phones to relieve stressful situations. In addition to friends, lecturers were a source of support. We suggest that the incorporation of stress and time management into the curriculum would be beneficial to first-year school of nursing students. We also propose that institutional support

units should be created to assist students in adjusting to the tertiary environment.

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