

Do Stress and Resilience among Undergraduate Nursing Students Exist?

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Abstract

Nursing students face developmental challenges as all other college students do and in addition experience unique stress due to exposure to clinical area that intensifies stress. These stressors can either contribute negatively and cause psychological harm or make them resilient. The aim of this study was to assess perceived stress and resilience levels of nursing students. There were 700 undergraduate nursing students studying in the college of whom 620 participants who gave their consent and fulfilled the sampling criteria were taken for the study. Perceived stress and the resilience scales were self administered to collect data from the study participants. The data obtained was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Study of perceived stress showed that 45.7% of them had severe stress. Study on resilience showed that 55% of them had low resilience. The study revealed a significant weak negative correlation ($r = -0.236$, $p = < 0.001$) between perceived stress and resilience. These findings suggest that resilience measures be adapted and made an intrinsic part of the educational program. This would give the students the needed strength and endurance to face the profession with confidence.

Keywords: Perceived stress, resilience, education, profession, undergraduate nursing students.

Introduction

Stress is a strain when you are faced with a demand that is either challenging or threatening. All individuals at all phases of life are exposed to stress and face varied challenges. But the most challenging period in one's life has been identified to be the adolescent and early adult period. According to research evidence students are stressed because of the crucial decisions that they are called to make on career and various other stressors that arise from academics, finances, lack of time management skills, unfamiliar environment, amount of work, student and teacher interaction etc.¹

Nursing students too are called to face these stressors and in addition clinical stressors. These clinical

stressors are due to procedures that they perform on patients that can harm them, realities of life like death and dying etc. The chaotic nature of health care itself coupled with these can have a cumulative effect on the psychological wellbeing of students.^{2,3,4} Unwarranted stress can be detrimental and can interfere even with academic performances and therefore investigating nursing students specifically in this set up can provide contextual understanding of stress among them.

On the other hand it is believed and acknowledged that there are those who also enjoy their work and find it satisfying despite stress and is said to have an element called resilience^{5,6,7}. Psychologists explain this resilience to be the ability to keep bouncing back each time one is faced with stress. Study of resilience revealed that it is not an inherent quality but is developed over time when faced with challenges. Knowing resilience to be an essential quality that can buffer stress, help must be offered to develop positive emotions and coping strategies among nursing trainees which are very vital for professional growth.⁸ This would certainly boost students general health and wellbeing, as it has the ability to nullify the

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effects of stress and promote adaptation. This would also help in the future sustain ability of nurses in healthcare.

Further stress and resilience of nursing students were thought to have a relationship with each other which showed that individuals who are highly resilient are less stressed than those who are not so resilient. This suggests that the impact of stressors is based on how it is perceived. Therefore the present study will help assess stress and resilience.⁹

Objectives:

- To assess perceived stress and resilience in undergraduate nursing students
- To determine relationship between stress and resilience in undergraduate nursing students
- To associate stress and resilience of undergraduate nursing students with selected demographic variables

Method

Design and Sampling: The study was conducted in a college of nursing that was attached for clinical experience to a multi-speciality tertiary care centre in South India. A quantitative approach with a cross sectional design was used to assess stress and resilience among undergraduate nursing students. The population consisted of 700 undergraduate nursing students studying in this college. Those who belonged to the baccalaureate program were 400 and diploma program were 300. About 620 undergraduate nursing students who consented to participate and fulfilled the sampling criteria were selected for the study.

Instruments: The instruments used for the study included demographic proforma, perceived stress and resilience scale.

Demographic Proforma: It consisted of age, gender, marital status, religion, type of family, type of community, medium of instruction at school, board of education completed, facademic school final exam and, current year of study, socio-economic status and comorbidities if present.

Perceived Stress Scale: Perceived stress scale (PSS) was used to measure stress. Participants were asked to circle how often they felt or thought a certain way. The scale has 14 items with a 5 point rating scale

(0=Never, 1=Almost never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Fairly often, 4=Very often). There are 4 items on the scale that are worded positively. The remaining ten items are worded negatively and reverse scoring was done for them. Interpretation of the scores of the perceived stress scale was done by calculating the median. Those above the median was considered as high level of stress and median below it as low level of stress.¹⁰

Resilience Scale: Resilience scale is a standardised scale that was used to measure resilience. It is a 25 item response scale that measures the degree of individual resilience which is considered a positive personality. All responses are scored on a seven point rating scale that ranges from one(disagree) to seven (agree). All responses are worded positively. Possible scores ranges from 25 to 175. According to the author of the instrument those who scored 130 or lower were considered to have low resilience and those with 160 and above were grouped to have high resilience. Those who scored between the range of 130 to 160 were considered to have medium resilience.⁹

Data Collection Procedure: The investigator met the participants class wise. The purpose of the study was informed to the participants and a written consent was obtained from them. Those who fulfilled the sampling criteria were given self administered scales to assess both perceived stress and resilience. The time taken to complete these questionnaires was about 15- 20 minutes. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution research committee. The participants were assured that the information given would be kept strictly confidential and used only for the study purpose.

Results and Discussion

The study of the demographics revealed that majority of the study participants were in the age group of 20 – 22 years (65%). These findings are found to be consistent with the findings of the study done by on age (66.7 %) that was done on nursing students in Ghana. Gender distribution of females were high as 88% as nursing predominantly consists of female population. About 92% were single and 74% were Christians who hailed from nuclear families (84%). About half of them (57%) were from urban community. Approximately 74% had English as the medium of instruction and about 62% of them were educated in state board. The study also showed that 88% were from middle class families.¹¹

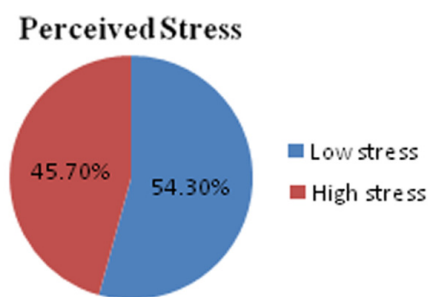


Figure 1: Perceived stress of the nursing students

The current study reveals that those who had high stress amounted to 45.7% as given in figure one. These findings are congruent with similar studies done among nursing students who showed high levels of stress.^{12,13} This is true as they face both academic and clinical challenges during their study.



Figure 2: Resilience in nursing students

The present study of the undergraduate nursing students showed that only 1.5% of the nursing students had high resilience as presented in figure two. This contradicts the study done by others who reported that 50% of the students had moderate to high levels of resiliency. This is true as cultural differences exist among nursing students in the Indian context, where they are generally more timid and lack the needed coping strategies to encounter stress faced by them.¹⁴

Further analysis demonstrates that there is a significant negative relationship that exists between stress and resilience ($r = -0.236, P = < 0.001$). This suggests that as stress goes higher resilience becomes lower and vice versa and thereby influence each other. This is congruent with a similar study reported in the literature.^{15,16} From this it is evident that resilience mediates perceived stress so that when students are all faced with the basic level of stress, the individuals protective factors determine whether the individual perceives the situation as stressful or not. On the other hand perhaps the individuals perception of stress mediates their resilience when the individual does not perceive situation as stressful and makes them resilient.

Current findings also indicate that there is no

significant association between stress and resilience scores and the selected variables. These findings are consistent with similar studies done on stress and stressors in nursing students. It shows that immaterial of the students background based on various demographics they are more or less similar when it comes to enduring stress and developing resilience.^{17, 18}

Conclusion

This study informs that stress is high and the fundamental element to counteract this stress called resilience is low. Although some amount of stress is necessary to perform daily tasks, when present in high amounts raises a concern. Knowing resilience being the key indicator for counteracting stress and protects the wellbeing of the students, there exists a huge need for it to be developed. Help can be offered to students to develop their own tool kit of strategies to cope. They should be taught to have positive self talk about the value they bring, making healthy lifestyle choices, having adequate rest, intake of nutritious food, exercise and play. Educators have a great responsibility to make them more resilient to face stress. They ought to make them more competent academically and clinically such that they face the future with confidence.

Conflict of Interest: None

Source of Fund: Self

Ethical Consideration: The study was conducted after approval by the college of nursing research committee. Permission of the dean was obtained before proceeding with the study. A written consent was obtained from all the participants, after informing them about the following:

- Purpose of the study
- Voluntary participation of the students
- Benefits
- Maintenance of confidentiality.

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