



WWJMRD 2024; 10(05): 91-95
www.wwjmr.com

*International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal*

*Impact Factor SJIF 2017:
5.182 2018: 5.51, (ISI) 2020-
2021: 1.361
E-ISSN: 2454-6615*

Christine Nyirahabimana
Department of Nursing, Mount
Kenya University,
Thika Campus - Nairobi –
Kenya.

Doctor Rosemary Okova
Department of Nursing, Mount
Kenya University,
Rwanda.

Doctor Connie Mureithi
Department of Nursing, Mount
Kenya University,
Rwanda.

Correspondence:
Christine Nyirahabimana
Department of Nursing, Mount
Kenya University,
Thika Campus - Nairobi –
Kenya.

Perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda

Christine Nyirahabimana, Doctor Rosemary Okova, Doctor Connie Mureithi

Abstract

The current studies revealed that students undertaking nursing profession are exposed to a wide range of stressors compared to other students in different disciplines. Coupled with academic stressors, these students face additional stressors such as extreme workload in their training, responsibilities in clinical settings during their placements, and field attachments, tough evaluation combined with accumulation of academic duties among others. However, in Rwanda, there is no research that has been done on stress among nursing students. This study explored the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. A cross-sectional descriptive study design using qualitative approach has been used. The Dean and Head of Department from each institution involved in the study were interviewed. The key informants interview guide composed of questions to explore the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda were used. Data collection period was between January and October 2022. Verbatim quotes from respondents were used to report the results. The study key informants reported that the nature and organization of nursing courses, high tuition fees for nursing courses, and multiple responsibilities of some nursing students are considered as the possible leading causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. The study respondents listed the poor performance, depression and drugs abuse to be the most possible consequences of stress among nursing students who are not able to manage stress effectively. For improving the general well-being and academic performance of nursing students, there is a need of interventions with the aim to support them for effective stress management.

Keywords: Stress, stressors, stress management, Rwanda.

1. Introduction

Nursing is a practical profession that requires both practical and theoretical proficiency in clinical settings. The practice has been proven to advance knowledge and skills among students who study nursing profession, by supporting their ability and efforts to translate theoretical knowledge into practices that aim to improve patient outcomes. There is scientific evidence that supports that to acquire required skills in this profession, problem solving, a sense of professionalism and critical thinking as well as decision making are required among others¹. To build much the practical part, clinical and practical placements are arranged for these students in different clinical settings, including hospitals, clinics, and health centres. Therefore, these students undergone a huge stress in these placements, and may feel more stressed to cope effectively especially on environmental factors, workmate relationships, and work overload. These situations seem to be challenging to these students, and sometimes their capacity or ability to cope are exhausted, leading to chronic stress. However, chronic stress may affect undoubtedly their physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioural life, thus compromising their general well-being. This is also considered to be a major risk factor of stress among students studying nursing professions². Several studies have identified higher level of stress among students to impair their academic

performance and ability to deliver much in their nursing profession. However, in the viewpoints of individual perception, stress may vary depending on individual perception on how to cope and manage stressful situations and events. Therefore, in nursing profession, it is of paramount importance to consider the academic context in which these students are, for better addressing their needs³. Studies found special stressors for university students such as multiple duties, inadequate time management, variations in patterns of eating, drinking, and sleeping, and lack of time and sometimes means for self-care⁴. Academic stress is the kind of psychological distress caused by factors pertaining to one's academic performance. The stressors that cause academic stress vary depending on the student, but they all have in common the fear of failure in some way or another⁵. If psychological stress is not well managed, it may have serious physiological complications like lack of concentration in cognitive activities, inadequate social relationship, excessive tiredness, lack of appetite or excessive appetite, a weak immune system, insomnia and others⁶.

However, in Rwanda, there is no research that has been done on stress among nursing students. Therefore, a study was done with the objective to explore the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda.

2. Methods

Study design and period

The study design was a cross-sectional descriptive study that used qualitative approach for granting a better understanding of the research problem and the study period was between January and October 2022.

Study setting and sampling procedure

In this study, nursing leaders from 1 public institution (University of Rwanda) and 2 private nursing schools (Mount Kenya University Rwanda, and Ruli Higher Institute of Health) were selected. The selection of three nursing schools, from a total number of six nursing schools in Rwanda was purposely. For collecting qualitative data, purposive sampling technique was used to choose two (2) key informants from each institution involved in the study. Known also as "judgmental or authoritative sampling technique", purposive sampling technique is based on purposes of researcher where subjects are chosen according to the specific purpose in the mind of researcher. It is in that background that from each institution, the Dean and Head of Department were interviewed about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students. Dean and Head of Department are the right persons in the school of nursing who know the daily life of nursing students.

Data collection procedures

Study instruments developed by the researchers were used to collect information related to the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. The key informants interview guide composed of 2 main questions to explore the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda were used.

Data processing and analysis

The results of the study were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Two themes were created, and categories were deducted under each theme. As for this, three

categories were created in the first theme related to the possible causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, and two categories were created under the second theme related to the possible consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda.

Ethical approval

Ethical clearance was sought and granted from Mount Kenya University Institutional Review Board (Ref: PhDNS/47028/2016), and the researcher requested permission to conduct research at University of Rwanda (Ref: No 273/CMHS IRB/2022), Mount Kenya University Rwanda (MKUR), and Ruli Higher Institute of Health (Ref.:038/RHIH/2022). Participants were formally informed on voluntary participation and were briefed about the study. In addition, participants were kept anonymous, their privacy and confidentiality were preserved. Participants were informed about their rights for participation and to withdraw from the study at any stage of the study. Furthermore, eligible participants accepted and voluntarily provided their written consent prior participating into the study.

3. Results

In this study, two (2) key informants from each selected institution were interviewed to get information related to their perception about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. The related results are presented using verbatim quotes of the study respondents.

Theme 1: Possible causes of stress among nursing students.

Category 1: Nature and organization of nursing courses

The nature and organization of nursing courses were presented by all members during the key informants' interviews as one of the possible causes of stress among nursing students.

"Internationally, nursing courses are organized in special manner. Theory classes, skills lab sessions followed by Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) and clinical placements at different levels of health care settings followed also by practical exams make nursing academic workload very heavy than other courses. That structure of nursing program requests nursing schools to cover long period (academic year) than other schools; and nursing students are often requested to work even extra hours, nights, and weekends. More stress is exhibited in preparing and during Nursing Council licensing exams. That nature and organization of nursing courses cause too much stress to nursing students".

Category 2: Tuition fees is high in Nursing schools

During the key informants' interviews, the high tuition fees for nursing course was stated by the majority of respondents as the possible causes of stress among nursing students. One of the participants said *"I am with nursing students for more than 15 years. The organization of nursing courses (theory classes, skills labs sessions and clinical placements) make them very expensive than other courses. Difficult and expensive living conditions during their clinical practice also increase the stress to nursing students".*

Category 3: Multiple responsibilities

In relation to the possible causes of stress among nursing students, another KI responded as follows *"Some students have multiple responsibilities especially those attending upgrading nursing program. In addition to the responsibility of being students, they are also staff nurses in health centers*

or hospitals. Furthermore, most of them are married (mothers or fathers in families). To combine the above-mentioned responsibilities is not easy and I use to see them overloaded”.

Theme 2: Possible consequences of stress among nursing students

Category 1: Poor Performance

The poor performance was identified by all KIs to be one of the possible consequences of stress among some nursing students who are not able to manage stress effectively. One KI responded that *“Nursing curriculum is designed in a special manner which causes stress to the students. If X student do not know how to manage stress, absolutely, she / he exhibit poor performance and failure. Thus, there is a need of a special program to assist nursing students coping with stress in their journey towards our noble profession”*.

Category 2: Depression and drugs abuse

“Moderate level of stress is recognized to be energizing as it helps people meeting their deadline. But, when stress is not well managed and it becomes chronic, it will lead to serious health problems including depression and most of people not only youth, even adults use to deal with depression by drug consumption resulting in many cases to drug addiction”.

4. Discussion

In this study, the perception of nursing schools’ leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda was explored. The nature and organization of nursing courses were presented by all members during the key informants’ interviews as one of the possible causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. Our results are supported by other studies conducted in different corners of the world.

Two different studies have been conducted in the year of 2014 and 2017, in School of nursing at the University of Louisville with the main aim to identify nurse students’ stressors. It has been shown that nursing students find clinical placements more stressful in their educational process than the theoretical component⁷⁻⁸.

New students face enormous challenges, including the fear of taking decision in clinical setting during their internships than the older ones. They also face financial constraints, limiting their ability to effectively afford transportation, accommodations, and other basic needs, to advance their academic performance⁹.

Students in higher academic levels, may be required to gain more practical experiences that are needed yet to be nurse professionals. These students feel the need to start new responsibilities, but it is obvious to realise that this can generate some level of stress too. However, this may justify the fact that students in more advanced academic levels may feel more stressed than those in lower levels. Coupled with the above, there is also a need to reflect on multitude of uncertainties and doubts that may arise when students in nursing schools think on labour market in nursing profession. These students undergo a tough process or certification, licensing, and approvals, which may affect or delay the realization of their expectations as prospective health professionals¹⁰.

In addition, given that nurse students are normally not considered as same as the registered nurses, may bring some frustrations and stress, thus exposing them to some feeling of lack of confidence, and expose them to some tasks that

are usually done by nurses. Coupled with this, students delay making adaptation specially to build strong work relationships with other health professionals, the rankings observed in hospitals, situations and cultural behavioural of different patients and families (caregivers), complexity of some treatment options may all add up to the existing stressors, thus building more negative effects. This is because, in contrast to students in other degree programs, nursing students are in touch with the fieldwork, which necessitates a certain level of responsibility in the well-being of their patients, distancing them, at times, from campus life and particularly from the typical social activities that their peers attend¹¹.

Compared with other countries especially globally, African countries report a considerable number of students who experience elevated levels of stress. This may be dictated by different contextual factors that are solely encountered in Africa, such as poverty. As for instance, 50% of African countries are categorized below poverty line, and 25% live in extreme poverty, and these situations alone may increase the level of stresses among African population including students².

The above data support the findings of the present study. When asked about possible causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, the majority of respondents stated that the high tuition fees for nursing course is considered to be among the leading causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda. One of the participants said that *“I am with nursing students for more than 15 years. The organization of nursing courses (theory classes, skills labs sessions and clinical placements) make them very expensive than other courses. Difficult and expensive living conditions during their clinical practice also increases the stress to nursing students”*.

Similarly, this pattern is coupled with the insufficient resources in many educational institutions and clinical settings in Africa. Again, studies have reported insufficient number of human resources to effectively support students in their clinical practice engagements. This implies higher burden of fear to these students, of acquiring or contracting some of hospital acquired infections such as HIV, tuberculosis, and others¹.

Other studies have demonstrated that students in lower academic levels appear to experience higher levels of stress, that are mostly related to both theoretical and practical parts of the courses, but, also to their insufficient knowledge in matter of stress management measures. This may be explained by the fact that there is a lot of academic works, coupled with that these students are new in the field of nursing, and that are facing new courses in the discipline, and all these may bring more concerns to these students, thus increasing the level of stress¹².

In relation to the possible consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, the poor performance was mentioned to be the most possible consequences by all KIs. One respondent answered as follow during the research interview *“Nursing curriculum is designed in a special manner which causes stress to the students. If X student does not know how to manage stress, absolutely, she / he exhibits poor performance and failure. Thus, there is a need of a special program to assist nursing students coping with stress in their journey towards our noble profession”*.

Our findings are in line with others in matter of possible consequences of stress among nursing students. Either lower

or moderate levels of stress are able to influence student behaviour in terms of motivating positively or negatively the students' performance. Contrarily, higher levels of stress are known to negatively impact the student's academic performance, thus leading to depression and despair, and therefore affecting students' health and academic level. Although stress might be inevitable among students in nursing discipline, and sometimes difficult to overcome, it is imperative to have adaptable coping mechanism that may help students to improve both their health and academic performances¹³.

Studies have demonstrated that these stressful conditions either internal or external affect negatively students' academic performance and their life in general. Fortunately, the same studies found also that, the way the students respond to the stressors are changed and improved over time with the opportunities to be exposed to the discussions, lectures, public talks among others in order to change their mind-sets about dealing with stress. The recommendations from several studies state that educational institutions assess all causes and factors that can bring stressing level on high level, and try to minimize, reduce, or avoid them whereas possible. This can be achieved on one hand by formulating program policies and interventions that aim at supporting students' efforts towards academic performance and improved well-being in general¹⁴.

In our days, colleges and schools of nursing are now recognized as environment which cause stress that often affect the academic performances and psychological well-being of students and vice-versa. Additionally, published studies report that emotional and behavioural problems, among high stress exposure groups, such as in nursing students may affect their lifetime risk of mental health disorders¹⁵. Existing scientific evidence supports the idea that these students use most of the time negative coping mechanisms having in their mind that those mechanisms are the best way to deal with the daily life stressors¹⁶.

To respond to that issue, there is a need of improved knowledge on coping mechanisms and strategies as attitudes are always dependent to the knowledge. By putting emphasize on the reinforcement of positive coping mechanisms and discouraging the negative ones, this can absolutely promote the capability of nursing students to cope effectively with daily life stressors, thus improve their education outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The objective of the present study is to explore the perception of nursing schools' leaders about possible causes and consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, and the study findings revealed that the study objective was attained. In relation to the possible causes of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, nursing schools' leaders stated that the nature and organization of nursing courses are considered as the leading cause of stress among nursing students in Rwanda; followed by high tuition fees for nursing course, and multiple responsibilities of some nursing students. In other hand, when interviewed about the possible consequences of stress among nursing students in Rwanda, the nursing schools leaders mentioned the poor performance, depression and drugs abuse to be the most possible consequences of stress among those who are not able to manage stress in the effective way. There is a need of interventions that aim at supporting nursing students to

effectively manage stress for their improved well-being in general and then their academic performance.

6. Acknowledgement

The team of authors bow in profound gratitude to God Almighty for his constant protection throughout this study. Our special thanks to our family members for their love and support.

References

1. Fernanda, M.S., et al. (2020). Stress level among undergraduate nursing students related to the training phase and sociodemographic factors. A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nurse Educ Today*. 63:119–29.
2. Baluwa, M.A., (2022). Stress and Coping Strategies Among Malawian Undergraduate Nursing Students. A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nurse Educ Today*. 63:119–29.
3. Chaabane, S. et al. (2021). Perceived stress, stressors, and coping strategies among nursing students in the Middle East and North Africa: an overview of systematic reviews. *Systematic Reviews*.10 (1):136.
4. Jimenez, C., Navia-Osorio, P., & Diaz, C. (2015). Stress and health in novice and experienced nursing students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 66(2), 442-455.
5. Associated Press. Associated Press and MTVu in 2018 describes how multiple stressors work together to Impact College students' lives. New York: Best Colleges. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001691823001907>.
6. Medline Plus (2022). Stress and your health. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003211.htm>
7. Sheu, S., et al. (2014). The development and testing of perceived stress scale of clinical practice. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 341-351.
8. Katrina, T. & Valerie, L. (2017). Stress and anxiety among nursing students: A review of intervention strategies in literature between 2009 and 2015. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 21-29.
9. María, D.O. et al. (2020). Anxiety, perceived stress and coping strategies in nursing students: a cross-sectional, correlational, descriptive study. *BMC Medical Education* volume 20, Article number: 370
10. Reddy, K.J.; Menon, K.R. & Thattil, A. (2018). Academic Stress, and its Sources among University Students. *Biomedical and Pharmacology Journal*. 11(1):531–7.
11. Tung, Y.J., et al. (2018). Prevalence of depression among nursing students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nurse Educ Today*. 63:119–29.
12. Atlantic University (2022). The effects of stress on college students and ways to overcome it. Retrieved November 5, 2022, from <https://bau.edu/blog/effects-of-stress/>
13. Devkota, R. & Shrestha, S. (2018). Stress among bachelor level nursing students. *Nepal Med Coll J*. 20(1-3):33–40
14. Thomas, B. (2022). The Student's Guide to Managing Stress in College. Retrieved November 5, 2022, from <https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/balancing->

stress/

15. Lewis, S.L, & Shaw, C.A. (2014). Stress and stress management. In M. H. S. Lewis, Medical surgical nursing: Assessment and management of clinical problems 7th Ed. (pp. 560-606). St. Louis, MO: Mosby.
16. Nebhinani, M., Kumar, A., Parihar, A. and Rani, A. (2020). Stress and coping strategies among undergraduate nursing students: A descriptive assessment from Western Rajasthan. Indian Journal of Community Medicine, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 172–175, Apr. 2020, doi: 10.4103/ijcm.IJCM_231_19.