

Perceived stressors among undergraduate Nursing Students, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

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Abstract- Nursing education is one of the main disciplines in Sri Lankan university system. The major purpose of nursing education is to prepare nurses to meet the health care needs of the community. It has increasingly been restructured to respond the rapidly changing demands. The nursing education has long been perceived that nursing students experience higher levels of stress than other students. Its effects could be reflected in student's social, mental health and academic performance. This cross sectional descriptive study aimed to identify symptoms of stress and stressors in academic work of nursing students in University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka during July to November, 2013. A pretested questionnaire was used to collect information from randomly selected 100 nursing students. Out of these, 78.6% were female. Among the participants, 28.6%, 33.9%, 23.2% and 14.3% were in first year, second year, third year and fourth year respectively. The highest mean score of the symptoms of stress were having trouble concentrating on what they are doing and unable to stop thinking about their concerns at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day. The least symptom of stress the students having been taking over-the-counter medications or prescription drugs to relax. All first, second and third year students reported that they eat, drink, or smoke in response to anxiety producing situations while only fourth year students reported experience, anxiety or nervous indigestion most of the time. Among the stressors perceived by both male and female students, they perceived workload as the most stressful factor. Competition with fellow students, inadequate resources to do assignments were perceived as high stressors among first and second year students. Both third and fourth year students perceived high expectations from parents as their most stressful factor. The results suggest the importance of maintaining proper academic environment for better learning. Also, the university has the responsibility to address probable sources of stress effectively to promote health being of the students.

Index Terms- stressors, nursing students, university nursing students

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a natural phenomena and it is the perception of discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands. It has become an important issue in a variety of social, employment, and academic settings. University is a stressful time for many students as they go through the process of adapting to new educational and social environments. Transition of students from school environment to university environment could cause a psychological, academic and social shock to them, since this educational system has huge differences: the student will face new methods of teaching, new academic requirements, new type of relations between students and faculties and even new relations among students themselves [1], [2].

Nursing education is one of the main disciplines in Sri Lankan university system. The major purpose of nursing education is to prepare nurses to meet the health care needs of the community. It has increasingly been restructured to respond the rapidly changing demands[3]. The nursing education has long been perceived that nursing students experience higher levels of stress than other college students [4]. Its effects could be reflected in student's social, mental health and academic performance [5], [2], [6]. Although many research studies have been conducted internationally, there is lack of studies on identifying stressors among university nursing students in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study aimed to identify symptoms of stress and stressors in academic work of nursing students in University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

II. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This cross sectional descriptive study aimed to identify symptoms of stress and stressors in academic work of nursing students in University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka during July to November, 2013. Ethical approval was granted from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the University. A pretested questionnaire based on literature review and Agolla and Ongori [5] was used to collect information from randomly selected 100 nursing students. Descriptive statistic used to analyze the data which was run in SPSS 16.0.

III. RESULTS

Among the participants of the study, 78.6% were female and 28.6%, 33.9%, 23.2% and 14.3% were in first year, second year, third year and fourth year respectively.

Table I: Symptoms of stress among students

Symptoms	Mean	SD
Have trouble concentrating on what I'm doing, because of worrying about other things	2.12	0.61
Can't stop thinking about my concerns at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day	2.12	0.66
People at home or school make them feel anxious	2.04	0.47
Feel tense, experience pain in the neck or shoulders, and suffer from migraine headaches, or have difficulty in breathing	2.02	0.59
Experience, anxiety or nervous indigestion	1.98	0.52
Eat, drink, or smoke in response to anxiety producing situations	1.41	0.65
Take over-the-counter medications or prescription drugs to relax	1.25	0.55

The major symptoms of stress in students were having trouble concentrating on what they are doing and unable to stop thinking about their concerns at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day. The least symptom of stress the students having been taking over-the-counter medications or prescription drugs to relax.

All first, second and third year students reported that they eat, drink, or smoke in response to anxiety producing situations while only fourth year students reported experience, anxiety or nervous indigestion most of the time.

Table II: Perceived stressors among students

Perceived Stressors	Mean	SD
Inadequate resources to do assignments	2.41	0.63
Low motivation	2.41	0.68
Unfair treatment by boyfriend/girlfriend	2.34	0.75
Continuous poor Performance	2.32	0.64
High expectations from parents	2.25	0.72
Poor performances	2.25	0.73
Conflict with lecturers	2.06	0.84
Competition with fellow students	2.05	0.7
Conflict with fellow students	2	0.79
Not attending lectures	1.86	0.82

Among the stressors perceived by both male and female students, they perceived workload as the most stressful factor. Competition with fellow students, inadequate resources to do assignments were perceived as high stressors among first and second year students. Both third and fourth year students perceived high expectations from parents as their most stressful factor.

IV. DISCUSSION

In this study, both male and female students perceived their symptoms of stress as having trouble concentrating on what they are doing and unable to stop thinking about their concerns at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day. The probable reason for these may be due to worrying about other things such as following lots of extra courses during their university life.

The study reveals that the nursing students do not take to drugs or alcohol as coping strategies when they stressed and that may be because of knowing side effects of drugs and alcohol which alters the healthy life of students. Further, this finding is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Agolla and Ongori [5].

All students except the final year experienced of eat, drink, or smoke in response to anxiety producing situations. This finding is consistent with the earlier findings of the scholars which revealed that, people tend to resort to drinking as coping strategies whenever confronted with complex situations in their lives.

The fourth year students reported experience, anxiety or nervous indigestion most of the time. The finding is consistent to previous studies conducted by Ahmed et al [8] reflecting most of the students are experiencing stress in their daily academic activities. This may be due to the fear of final examinations and uncertainty of getting jobs after graduation from the university.

Work load has become the major stressor among students. The semester system needs to cover all lecturers, multiple subjects, continuous assessments, clinical experience and all end semester examinations within a limited time period. They need to travel for getting their clinical training to the hospital which is very far away from the university. The similar results could be seen in the study done by Prabhakar and Gowthami [7].

All the students entered to the university after getting through a highly competitive examination called advanced level. Therefore, the students who are in the first and second year may think of the similar situation in the university system. Because of that they may perceive competition with fellow students as a stressor. This finding is consistent with the previous study conducted by Agolla and Ongori [5]. Also, these students pointed out that their stress is aggravated by the inadequate resources which could not meet their needs.

However, both third and fourth year students perceived high expectations from parents as their most stressful factor. These students are in the final year of three year and four year degree programs and thinking of their families. Research studies have highlighted that the effect of parental and peer pressure to perform cannot be ignored [4].

V. CONCLUSION

The study revealed the most stressful symptoms of stress experienced by the university nursing students and their perceived stressors during their university life. Therefore, it draws the attention of administrators as well as academic community regarding the importance of maintaining proper academic environment for better learning. Also, the university has the responsibility to address probable sources of stress effectively to promote health being of the students. Academics have the responsibility to impact the development of their students as they transition into nurses capable of handling the rigors of the profession.

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