

## Factors Associated with Stress among Nursing Students At Sungai Petani College of Nursing During Final Examination

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### Abstract

Nursing students are extremely valued human resources. Identifying possible stress among nursing students is critical since stress can lead to decreased productivity, reduced quality of life, and suicidal tendencies. Following the signing of the stress issue in education, this study was conducted to identify the factors that cause stress among nursing students at the Sungai Petani Nursing College when facing their final examination. A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out, which involved 60 respondents using stratified random sampling method. The inclusion criteria were year one, two and three of nursing students. The questionnaire instrument contains two parts, namely, part A which consists of demographic questions with four closed-ended questions and two comprehension questions about stress, and part B comprises 25 closed-ended questions on the factors that cause stress among student nurses. The study's findings found that the three factors (intra-personal, environmental, and basic convenience) that contribute to stress among nursing students are due to semester exams influenced by insufficient time for revision, tight daily schedule, and unconducive environmental factors. The findings are useful for nurse educators and clinical staff in assessing students'

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### Introduction

Stress is a feeling of restlessness, worry, or tension brought on by mental or physical strain (Dewan, 2005, p. 1526). According to Angela (2009), stress refers to the body's response to a change that requires emotional, physical, or mental adjustment. In general, stress is part of human life where it can have adverse effects (distress) and positive effects (eustress). Stress is a common occurrence in one's life that can alter one's daily thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. According to Mastura et al (2007), the university is a unique setting where students are frequently required to balance multiple responsibilities and tasks. If students fail to perform their duties properly, they will experience stress.

Some students can deal with stress without experiencing any negative physical, mental or emotional effects and they can motivate themselves. Some students are unable to manage stress when in college. Excessive stress, if not controlled, can cause various problems to students (Romas & Sharma, 2004), including mental issues (Ottati et al., 2005). As a result, students' degrees and causes of stress must be evaluated to implement effective strategies to combat anxiety.

## **Literature Review**

### **i. Causes of Stress**

Stress is a problem that students often face, especially before the final exam week of the semester. Stress will affect an individual's ability to solve a problem. According to Suraini (2005), a study on 94 students at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris found that academics, lecturers, personal and university issues are experienced by more than 70% to 91% of students. Meanwhile, sources of stress related to co-curricular activities, friends, family, and parents are experienced by roughly 60% to 70% of students. There are many factors that can trigger stress to occur among students. Among the factors identified are intrapersonal, academic, and environmental factors.

### **ii. Intra-personal Factors**

Intrapersonal factors such as personal problems, emotional problems, lack of self-confidence, depression, lack of time, and sleep disturbances can cause stress among students. This suggests that if a person has a problem that cannot be solved, it will disturb their mind and affect the productivity of that individual.

Students who believe they can achieve everything at the same time are stressed because they cannot manage their time well. Hatta (2002) stated that proper time management could prevent a person from experiencing stress, so they need to prepare a daily schedule to ensure they do not waste their time. Wise time management will prevent students from feeling stressed in life, especially during exam week.

### **iii. Academic Factors**

In terms of academic aspect, many assignments, many daily college activities, tight exam schedules, competition to get the best grades, and irregular schedule preparation can contribute to stress among nursing students. Thomas (2009) supports this statement, stating that stress is related to academic life. Practical fatigue in clinical placements also causes stress, and this idea is supported by Nolan and Smojkis (2003) who state that, "It might be supposed that some clinical areas are more stressful than others and lead to increased burnout among staff."

Most students stated that they experienced stress due to too much academic workload. Too many academic assignments will result in students not getting enough sleep and then they will be tired in class due to doing tasks until late at night. A study conducted by Najib et al (2005) on 1,923 students of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) discovered a significant relationship between workload and academic stress experienced by students. The more workload a student receives, the higher the pressure that the student experiences.

#### iv. Environmental Factors

The third factor is the environmental factor. The atmosphere and learning facilities in the college and the uncomfortable lecture rooms can make the nursing students stressed. Bojuwoye (2002), in his study of students at eight universities in South Africa, found that students experience stress due to the university's physical environment. An uncomfortable environment, noisy atmosphere, and poor lighting in study areas can lead to stress. Suraini (2005) discovered that the university was the second primary source of stress for university students after academic focus.

Noisy, crowded and dirty environmental conditions will cause students' concentration to learn to be disrupted. This condition will cause students to experience stress and to be unable to study well. Riggio (2003) states that learning environment factors can cause stress problems in individuals.

#### Methodology

The present study was conducted at the Sungai Petani Nursing College located at Sungai Petani, Kedah. The questionnaire took about 1 hour to complete. Stratified Random Sampling was used to distribute the questionnaires to 60 nursing students: 20 students from year one, 20 students from year two, and 20 students from year three.

The questionnaire contains 2 parts; part A consists of demographic questions with four closed-ended questions and two comprehension questions about stress, while part B comprises 25 closed-ended questions on the factors that cause stress among student nurses.

#### Results and Discussion

The demographic data shows that six (10%) of the respondents were aged 18-20 years old. Most of the respondents were 21-23 years old, with 37 (62%) respondents and 17 (28%) respondents were aged between 24-26 years. From that, 92% (55 people) of the student nurses experienced stress during the examination season, while 8% (5 people) of the student nurses did not experience any stress.

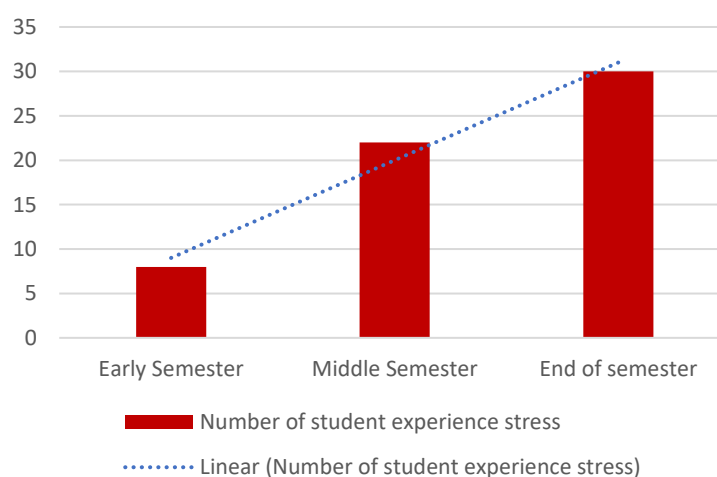


Figure 1: The number of students that were stressed out over the semester.

The graph above shows that 8 (13%) respondents began to feel stressed in the middle of the semester. 22 (37%) respondents experienced stress at the beginning of the semester, and 30

(50%) respondents started to feel pressure at the end of the semester. The data also revealed that 60% (36 people) of the respondents had difficulty sleeping, and 40% (24 people) did not have trouble sleeping.

The researchers found that the stress factor for the highest number of nursing students was at the end of the semester. It was influenced by insufficient time for revision, a tight daily schedule, and uncondusive environmental factors. The semester exam was essential for every student as it determines their future whether to pass or fail a certain subject. Based on the results obtained from the respondents, most respondents received PNGS between 3.00 - and 3.49. Nursing students are worried that if they fail in their semester exams, their CGPA will drop, putting pressure on them.

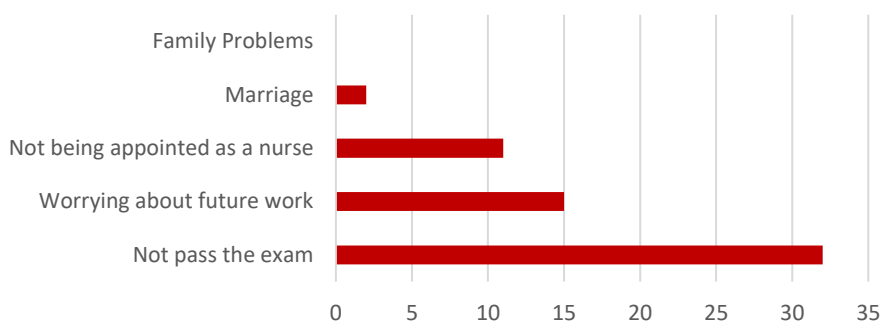


Figure 2: The number of students experiencing stress based on interpersonal factors.

The graph above shows the causes of stress contributed by the respondents’ intrapersonal factors, where 32 (53%) of the respondents experienced stress due to feeling worried about not passing the exam. 15 (25%) respondents were stressed about worrying about work time. 11 (18%) respondents were worried about not being appointed as a U29 nurse. 2 (3%) respondents were stressed about marriage and 0 respondent were worried about family problems. Therefore, the researchers suggest that each nursing student plan their study schedule to ensure they can manage their time well to review lessons in preparation for their exams. The college should plan daily activities at the college by considering the break time for the students to relax after a day of activities in class and to review lessons in the evening. In terms of teaching and learning methods, instructors can diversify teaching techniques to provide a fun atmosphere among students and this indirectly will help reduce their stress levels by conducting group learning, making questions and doing group presentations.

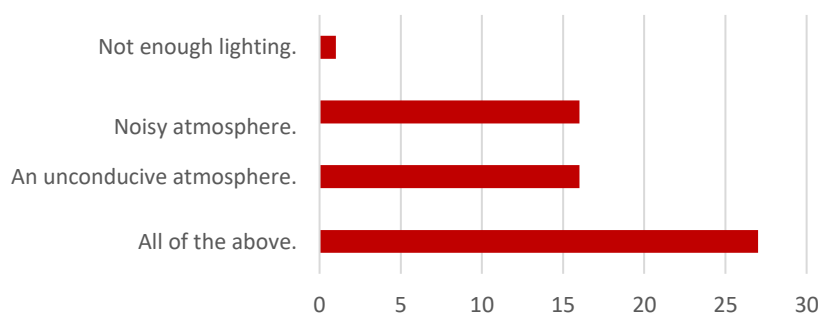


Figure 3: The number of students experiencing stress based on environmental factors.

Researchers can find out that non-conductive environmental factors also cause stress. 16 (27%) respondents stated that the noisy atmosphere made them stressed. While 16 (27%) respondents further noted that the unconducive environment also caused them to experience stress. Next, one (2%) respondent stated that insufficient lighting caused him to feel stressed, and 27 (45%) respondents revealed that all the environmental factors listed made them stressed.

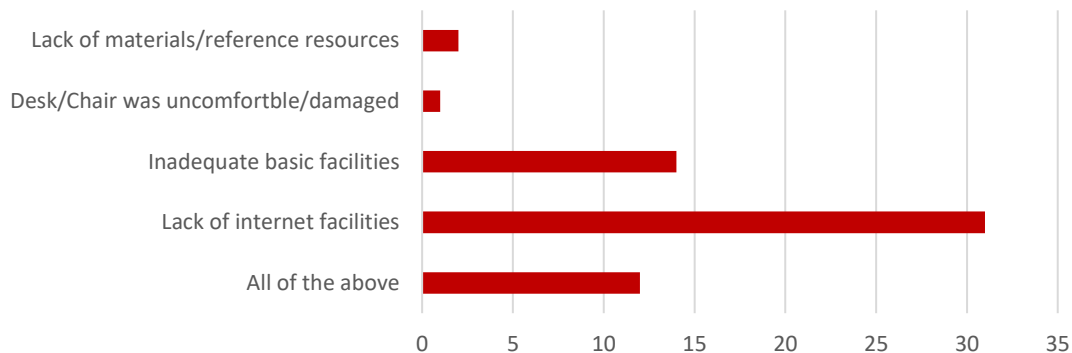


Figure 4: The number of students experiencing stress based on basic convenience factors.

From this study, researchers can also find out that the essential convenience factor also causes respondents to feel stressed facing their final exam. One person (2%) of the respondents stated that the desk/chair was uncomfortable and damaged, causing her stress. Next, 31 (52%) respondents stated that the lack of internet facilities caused them to experience stress in facing the final exam. While two (3%) respondents indicated that they were stressed to face their final exam due to lack of materials and reference resources at the college. 14 (23%) respondents admitted that other inadequate basic facilities caused them to feel stressed, and 12 (20%) respondents stated that the lack of basic facilities made them stressed to face the final exam.

### Conclusion

Nursing students are highly valued human resources. Identifying possible stress among nursing students is critical since stress can lead to decreased productivity, reduced quality of life, and suicidal tendencies. In this study, three main factors that contribute to stress have been discovered by the researchers. From this research, we can identify some detailed factors that cause students to experience stress; at the same time, educators can take preventive measures against these factors. The findings were helpful for nurse educators and clinical staff in assessing students' needs.

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