

## Stress Factors Among Nursing Students

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**ABSTRACT**

Stress is a health epidemic of the 21st Century. It can affect anyone at anytime, altering or impairing their general health (WHO). The study utilized the quantitative- descriptive correlational research design to determine the stress factors among the two hundred randomly selected nursing students of the University of Bohol, aided by a self-made questionnaire adopted from the Student Nurse Stress Index (SNSI) by Jones and Johnston 1999. The tool underwent Cronbach's Alpha test with a reliable result. The instrument was distributed online. Findings revealed that most respondents were young adults from 20-21 years old, female, and single. The respondents were moderately stressed with academic concerns and internet connectivity, followed by interpersonal and interpersonal problems. When the data were subjected statistically using SPSS with Spearman's rho test and chi-square, it was found that the year level had a significant relationship to stress levels.

**Keywords:** Stress, academic concern, internet connectivity, intrapersonal, interpersonal, quantative-descriptive-correlational, Spearman rho test, Chi-square, Bohol, Philippines

**INTRODUCTION**

For nursing students, stress is a widespread problem. Nursing students have a higher stress level than the overall student population in other disciplines (Şentürk & Dogam, 2018). During their nursing education, the students either directly or indirectly become tense from various stress factors that may hinder their learning and performance (Labrague, 2013; Sakellari, Psychogiou, Georgiou, Papanidi, Vlachou, & Sapountzi-Krepia, 2018).

Since the pandemic, the education system has shifted from face-to-face to online classes. Digital education has been adopted as the source of student education (Gautam, 2020). Students from different year levels experienced a lot of anxiety as they tried to adapt to this new educational system. They have experienced difficulty adapting to new technology and manipulating other digital learning platforms. Heavy assignments, adjusting to the use of new technology, problems with internet connectivity, and concerns about maintaining an excellent interpersonal relationship with groupmates when working as a team in a group. It has given rise to depression and anxiety disorders among undergraduate university students who experience stressful workloads, problems with internet connections, and challenges adapting to digital platforms and devices (Fawaz & Samaha, 2020).

Stress among nursing students focuses on their academic performance and environmental and clinical contexts (Parveen & Inayat 2017). In the educational context, students will become stressed when getting low scores, lack career advancement, and inability to balance study and leisure time. In the Clinical context, 39.3% of the students strongly agreed that maintaining a balance between clinical work and studying increases stress, and 44% on the behavior of the physician and nurses, and staff who criticized students in front of the patient induces stress as well. In the Environmental context, 64.7% of the students agreed that the lack of recreational facilities during the semester is a source or factor of stressors, and 97.3% of stress due to security risks in the job area causes stress (Parveen & Inayat, 2017).

According to the transactional model theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stress is the effect of an interplay between the individual and the environment. The theory defines stressors as the subjective assessment of a threatening or harmful condition. Lazarus and Folkman believed that stress is a crucial factor causing a bad equilibrium between the demands of students' lives. Their mental and physical health are also affected, causing anxiety that may result from internal perception or external environmental stimuli. Lazarus and Folkman suggested that daily hassles, which often appear unimportant in life, can be often taken for granted, which in itself can be stressful. Daily hassles among students are experiences that can attribute to anger, exasperation or irritation, distress or anxiety, and ultimately feelings exaggerated by responsibilities, which can form through an argument or disagreement, financial issues, and family worries or misunderstanding (Lazarus, 2013).

Different Students experience different kinds of stressors. Everyday stressors identified are the pressures to succeed in academics and life uncertainties (Shanmugam, 2017). The poor academic performance of the students is the cause of the ramifications of stress problems (Kernan & Wheat, 2008). The psychosocial phenomenon of stress problems causes pessimistic outcomes in nursing students' academic achievement, personal health, and overall well-being (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Yıldırım, Karaca, Cangur, Acikgoz, & Akkus, 2017; Shdaifat, 2018).

Students experienced challenges that caused negative perceptions and low self-esteem affecting their academic performance and general health (Alghamdi, 2019). During clinical practice, nursing students often experience a high level of anxiety that can cause psychological and emotional problems affecting poor performance in providing care to the patient. Inadequate knowledge and skills, on the other hand, can also trigger stress (Findik, Ozbas, Cavdar, Topcu & Onler, 2015). This has been seen among students from the lower level who often experience stress as they have difficulty understanding different medical terminologies as they read their assigned patients' health histories, medical diagnoses, and treatment (Aedh, Elfaki, & Mohamed, 2015). Nursing students experience multiple stressors as they apply theoretical learning and develop critical thinking skills professionally. This overwhelming negative stressor can lead to absenteeism and dissatisfaction (Kulland, 2014) among students.

Experiencing elevated levels of stress causes harm. When students cannot cope with stress adequately, it will affect their academic performance and interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Student nurses develop an interpersonal change in their social activities as they will have problems communicating their concerns with their close friends leading to conflict (Shanmugam, 2017). A heightened stress response will deteriorate nursing students' physical, psychological, and mental health. Stress causes nursing students to feel more detached and apathetic, contributing to their failure to manage and resolve situations (Dardas, 2015). Increased stress and low coping mechanisms may also lead to poor academic performance and burnout among nursing students (Shultz, 2011).

A study by Tim (2019) shows that social, environmental, academic, personal, and emotional factors affect nursing students. The fear of getting a failing grade, having low self-esteem, impaired sleep patterns, low satisfaction towards performance or work or discomfort, nervousness,

tiredness, and decreased financial aid cause stress to the students (Tim, 2019). Aside from that, exposure in clinical practice is another stressor perceived by nursing students, especially when exposed to the Intensive Care Unit, Emergency Room, Surgical Ward, and Medical units (Aedh et al. 2015). The tons of written requirements given to the students before their clinical exposure and taking care of different kinds of patients also cause stress.

During the pandemic, the University of Bohol College of Nursing has implemented online learning, both in theory and in their Related Learning Experience. This context prompted the researchers to conduct this study to determine the stress level among nursing students at the University of Bohol. The study looks into the profile of the respondents and determines their stress levels in terms of academic concerns, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, and internet connectivity problems. It examined the significant relationship between the respondents' demographic profile and stress levels. The result of the study served as the basis for formulating an Information Educational Campaign to help students reduce their perceived stress levels.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design employing random sampling. A questionnaire was distributed online to the two-hundred randomly selected Level 1-4 nursing students who consented to participate in the study. The study includes nursing students of the University of Bohol, 18 years old and above, and officially enrolled for the second semester of 2020-2021. Excluded from the study are irregular nursing students. A self-made questionnaire anchored on the ideas from the SNSI tool by Jones & Johnston (1999) was used in the study. The tool was pilot tested thrice to ten nursing students. Revisions were made to vague items until a reliable result was obtained, as shown below. The student nurses who already participated in the pilot testing were not included in the data gathering.

## Cronbach Alpha Result

Variable	Reliability Result	Description
Stress from Academic Concern	.877	
Stress from intrapersonal Concern	.728	The tool is reliable. The accepted result is at least .70
Stress from interpersonal concern	.782	
Internet Concern	.793	

The study underwent an ethics review from the University of Bohol Research Ethics Committee. Once clearance was obtained from UB-REC, permission was secured from the University of Bohol Vice President for Academics, and the Dean of the College of Nursing, to distribute the questionnaires to the respondent's Facebook (FB) messenger account after securing their consent. The gathered data was coded and strictly observed the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents. The data information was indeed secured and stored in the google drive account of the researchers. Only the researchers were permitted to access the data gathered, and these gathered data were only used for research purposes. The collected data underwent a normality test to determine the appropriate statistical test. Results revealed that the distributions of the data were skewed. Hence, nonparametric tests were employed in testing the research hypothesis using SPSS.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Demographic Profile of the Respondents.** It has been noted that there were more female respondents than males. The nursing profession is a caring profession. The social construction of being a nurse has typically meant a loving, hard-working woman. Male students perceive their image and status negatively because they often question their muscularity and sexuality (Ozdemir, Akansel, & Tunk, 2008). Moreover, the female-dominated nature of nursing, prevalent stereotypes and gender bias inherent in nursing education seem to make this an uncomfortable place for male

Males were likelier to leave the nursing course than females (McLaughlin, Muldoon & Moutray, 2009).

**Respondent's Level of Stress.** As to the level of stress of the respondents in terms of academic concern, findings revealed that that

respondents were “extremely stressed” about having a failing course grade, followed by the “fear of failing passing scores in examinations.” Taking examinations, insufficient time to meet commitments, too much academic work, and fear of oral presentations were common concerns among higher education students. If not appropriately managed, it will result in dropouts or low academic performance (Alsulami, Al Omar, Binnwejim, Alhamdan, Aldrees, Al-Bawardi, & Alhabeeb, (2018). Students fear failing course grades because of the unfinished quizzes due to the length of questions and the short timeframe given. Financial issues and personal health concerns are identified factors that cause the student to be unable to take the exam or quiz, resulting in a failing mark (Owen, 2015).

In terms of intrapersonal problems, the respondents had “Fear that one of their parents will get a serious illness,”; followed by “Feeling of being unhealthy due to lack of sleep” and “Failure to meet the expectations of parents regarding performance in school” which the respondents interpreted as “moderately stressed.” “Inadequate finances to support tuition fees” caused “mild stressed” to the respondents. The result conforms to the nature of children to be worried about their parent’s health and other family members. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption in education worldwide (Kim, Quiban, Sloan, and Montejano (2021). Although most colleges have shifted to online learning, some nursing schools continue to have clinical practicums requiring students to work in close contact with patients. The concern of viral transmission and the unpredictable progression of the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to nursing students’ increased unreliability of academic lead. It also negatively affects thinking Bublitz, Guido, Kirchof, Neves, Lopes, and (2021). Due to an overload of assignments and activities, nursing students experience sleep deprivation that can affect their academic performance, alter their mental health, and cause anxiety due to feeling sick or unhealthy.

Regarding stress from an interpersonal relationship, the “Lack of teamwork and cooperation from groupmates during a group activity” caused “moderate stress.” In contrast, “Misunderstanding with my roommates, close friends, and siblings” caused “Mild stressed” to the respondents. Interpersonal relationships are another factor during nursing education. Changes in social activities, fights with close ones, lack of cooperation from friends, lack of immediate and intimate friends, and conflict with roommates stress nursing students (Shanmugam, 2017). The pandemic

affected the lives of young adult students as they try to continually learn academically with the new educational platforms where they experienced limited to no social life, which causes them to experience stress and tension (Aslan, Silvia, Nugroho, Ramli, & Rusiadi, 2020).

Regarding stress from access to internet connectivity problems, respondents were moderately stressed when they have “unfinished assignments due to sudden disconnection of the internet” and when there was “Sudden disconnection during group interaction.” The students struggle to stabilize the home internet for online classes because of the pandemic. The education system shifted from face-to-face learning to an online class method. It would need an internet connection to use electronic devices for the assignments and requirements to be submitted and other online class activities. Many students were adjusting to using internet connections, especially students living in upland or isolated areas with poor or no internet connection which causes anxiety to nursing students.

**Table 1. Summary of the Level of Stress of the Respondents (N=200)**

Category	Weighted Mean	Descriptor	Interpretation	Rank
Academic	3.076	MS	Moderately stressed	1.5
Internet Connectivity	3.076	MS	Moderately stressed	1.5
Intrapersonal	2.857	MS	Moderately stressed	3
Interpersonal	2.3850	SS	Mildly stressed	4
Overall composite mean	2.8485	MS	Moderately stressed	

**Legend:**

Scaling	Descriptor	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.74	No Stress	No stress
1.75 – 2.49	Slightly Stress	Mildly stressed
2.50 – 3.24	Moderately Stress	Moderately stressed
3.25 – 4.00	Highly Stress	Extremely stressed

Data revealed that respondents had moderate stress, especially regarding the academic concern and internet connectivity. Interpersonal concerns also cause stress but to a mild degree compared to the three other identified categories of stress. Some students often aim to achieve

high marks and are concerned about receiving poor grades are just some of the top concerns of students academically (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2019). The pandemic causes the transition, especially in the educational system worldwide, which primarily affects third-world countries, including the Philippines. The new educational system needs technological involvement and digital devices for online classes. Problems with poor internet connection and unfamiliar use of technological devices also cause academic pressure among students (Kansas, 2020). Slow Internet connections or limited access from homes in rural areas can make students fall behind academically (Bauer, Brooks & Hampton, 2020). There are many ways that a lack of internet access can affect a student's academic performance. One of the biggest problems students face without internet access at home is their inability to complete homework or activities (Lynch, 2017). The effects of stress on nursing students have an impact on academic performance. This could trigger several psychiatric disorders as depression or anxiety, as well as other associated problems, such as sleep disorders, alcohol, and psychoactive drug consumption, which may affect their patient care (Pulido-Criollo, Cueto-Escobedo, & Guillén-Ruiz, 2018; Parveen & Inayat, 2017).

Table 2. Significant Relationship Between the Respondents' Profile and Their Level of Stress (N=200)

Variables	Statistical Treatment	Statistical Value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age and Level of Stress	Spearman's Rank Test	-0.137	0.053	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables
Sex/Gender and Level of Stress	Spearman's Rank Test	4.129	.248	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables
Civil status and level of stress	Spearman's Rank Test	5.838	.699	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables
Year Level and Level of Stress	Chi-square test	21.490	0.009	Reject null hypothesis	There is a significant relationship between the variables

The gathered data were subjected statistically using SPSS. The age, Sex, and Civil Status of the respondents and their level of stress were

subjected to Spearman's Rank Test with a P-value that is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant degree of relationship between age, Sex, and civil status to the levels of stress perceived by the respondents. On the other hand, when data on the year level and the stress level were subjected to the chi-square test, it resulted in a p-value of 0.009 which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, thus rejecting the hypothesis. This further means that the year level influences the student's stress level. Nursing students in the higher level are already being rotated to clinical areas handling more comprehensive cases than lower-year level nursing students, which causes the senior students to perceive higher stress levels than novice students.

Clinical training becomes more stressful than academic training, especially since clinical training requires adequate knowledge and skills. Students exposed to the clinical area may also fear making mistakes, handling emergencies, irregular clinical practice, and visiting specialized units (Onieva-Zafra, Fernández-Muñoz, Fernández-Martínez, García-Sánchez, Abreu-Sánchez & Parra-Fernández, 2020). Stress levels increase according to the training or the academic year or decrease as the student becomes more trained (Onieva-Zafra, Fernández-Muñoz, Fernández-Martínez, García-Sánchez, Abreu-Sánchez & Parra-Fernández, 2020). The closer the students are to the professional phase, the greater the adaptation effort. The activities developed at each year level offer different situations that can be perceived as stressful, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the student's cognitive and emotional resources to cope (Mussi, Pires, Silva, Macedo, & Santos, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Implementing the new educational platform during the pandemic caused moderate stress to the UB College of Nursing students, especially in the academic aspect and internet connectivity. It also caused moderate stress to their intrapersonal relationship and mild stress to their interpersonal relationship. Moreover, among the respondents, a significant association has been found between year level and the level of stress. Lazarus's transactional model theory of stress and coping emphasizes the individual's and his environment's interplay. The demands of the student's academic activities cause the students to experience stress, especially when a solid internet connection is highly needed to comply with the task.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. In coordination with the guidance office, the nursing department should continually implement programs and training for students to help them cope with stress.
2. Lobby to the Local government unit the findings of this study to be used as a basis for allocating government funds in their budget for enhancing internet connectivity, especially in rural areas.
3. For the local communities to provide free and easy internet access to students in their localities, as it would be beneficial if an internet connection is not accessible at the student's homes. A designated community access area allows students to participate in online courses when no other options are available. Government assistance to the student population allows them to learn online techniques in this modern world, which is a fundamental tool for the progress of its society.
4. Encouraging new nursing students to prepare to enter the profession is of paramount importance, so we must take care of them. Unnecessary stress should be avoided as much as possible during their educational training to prevent levels of discouragement that causes them to leave before completion. It's not possible to eliminate all stress in learning. A certain amount of stress and anxiety often pushes us to excel, but it must be manageable. With attention and awareness of the problem, it can be controlled and lessened not to overwhelm young students who desperately need to be trained in the nursing profession.

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