LEVEL OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH PERCEIVED STRESS AND ANXIETY IN THE CLINICAL SETTINGS AMONG NURSING STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BOHOL

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ABSTRACT

Article history:

Submission: 20 June 2025
Revised: 9 November, 2025
Accepted: 19 December 2025
Publication: 15 January 2026

Keywords — nursing students, stress, coping strategies, clinical setting, University of Bohol

Stress has an impact on both students' academic and clinical performance during the academic year. Stress, on the other hand, can be managed and avoided through the use of various coping mechanisms. This descriptive-correlational quantitative study aims to determine the level of stress and coping strategies utilized by nursing students at the University of Bohol in dealing with perceived stress and anxiety in clinical settings. There were 326 respondents for the study coming from the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th nursing students who have already experienced Related Learning Exposure (RLE) in the clinical setting. The stress level was determined using a Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) while a Coping Behavior Inventory (CBI) was used to determine

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the level of coping strategies. The majority of respondents were females (72.4%), aged 20 to 24 years old, coming from 2nd year level. The stress level of the respondents ranges from slight to moderate. The most common was from the assignments and workloads and the teachers and nursing staff. Common coping strategies utilized were avoidance and problem-solving. The study revealed a non-significant relationship between the level of stress and coping strategies of the nursing students, indicating that the respondent's stress level did not significantly affect how they utilized their coping strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common feeling that individuals experience throughout life when they are in a state of worry or mental tension due to a challenging situation. This is especially true for college students, who naturally respond by confronting difficulties and threats (WHO, 2023). Due to the extensive academic demands that college programs place on students, learners experience high stress while completing their degrees. These elevated levels can negatively impact students' mental and physical well-being.

The ability to adapt to stress relies on effective coping mechanisms. While everyone employs coping strategies, not all are equally effective or suitable for the situation. Recognizing the relevance of stress adaptation, coping mechanisms become pivotal in managing its impact (Laal & Aliramaie, 2010). While coping strategies are universally employed to alleviate stress, their effectiveness varies, and their suitability to different situations is not uniform. Effective coping techniques can help students improve their academic performance and stress management (Madian & Ahmed, 2019).

One-third of all post-secondary education students ranked stress as their highest health impediment, followed by sleep issues, depression, and anxiety (American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, 2009). Stress levels of nursing students may change over time or across situations due to the transitional nature of nursing education. During this transitional process, college students already have a foundation for their future life goals (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007).

The choice to undertake this study stems from the perceived need to understand and manage the mental health difficulties that nursing students confront during their clinical training. The training and experience students gain during work placements are even more vital, as individuals often work in sensitive circumstances and environments. This creates an extremely stressful healthcare environment, leading to higher perceived stress among students in this sector (Bhurtun, Azimirad, Saaranen, and Turunen, 2019). If not managed appropriately, stress can cause anxiety, burnout, and other mental health difficulties. To fill gaps in understanding how nursing students perceive and manage stress during clinical experience, this study aims to determine the level of stress in clinical settings and the coping mechanisms employed by

nursing students at the University of Bohol.

Theoretical Background

This study is anchored on the Neuman Systems Model by Betty Neuman, which focuses on the individual's response to stressors and the use of interventions to promote optimal health and wellness. It emphasizes creating a supportive learning environment to mitigate these challenges and improve students' clinical performance. When nurses understand the relationship between the individual and their surroundings, they can make better clinical judgments, help the client and their family, and increase the client's chances of regaining health and recovering quickly (Hannoodee & Dhamoon, 2020).

Next, the Stress Adaptation in Clinical Nursing (SACN) Theory by Susan Turner (1991) focuses on how nursing students adapt to stress within the clinical environment. This suggests that stress is an inherent part of clinical training and that students undergo an adaptation process characterized by shock, resistance, and integration (D'emeh & Yacoub, 2021). Watson's Theory of Human Caring provides a philosophical foundation for understanding life satisfaction and quality of life as outcomes of meaningful caring relationships. The theory emphasizes that beyond technical competence, genuine human connection and emotional presence significantly influence patients' sense of well-being, dignity, and purpose, particularly in chronic care settings (Alligood, 2014).

Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Agenda, titled "Good Health and Well-Being," encourages countries to ensure healthy lives and foster well-being for all people of all ages. The inability to manage and difficulty in resolving these stressful events can impair the student's well-being and might result in mental health problems, including anxiety and depression (UNICEF, 2021). The "Mental Health Act of 2018," also known as Republic Act No. 11036, pledges to advance people's well-being by guaranteeing that mental health is recognized, encouraged, and protected. This act includes improving mental health in educational institutions, the workplace, and communities among its goals. Section 24 of the law States That Educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, universities, and technical schools, must adopt policies and programs that raise awareness of the relevance of mental health concerns among instructors, students, and other personnel (The Lawphil Project, 2018). The Republic Act No. 9173, also known as the Nursing Act of the Philippines 2002, states that all nursing education programs shall provide a sound general and professional foundation for nursing practice (Section 25).

Related Literature. Stress is becoming more common in society, and nursing students are no exception. Nursing students aged 18 to 25, as well as women, had a higher percentage of stress cases than men, which may be related to the history of nursing being seen as a feminine profession. This explains why women make up the majority of nursing undergraduate students (Cestari, Barbosa, Florêncio, Pessoa, and Moreira, 2017).

Without a doubt, clinical practice is an essential component of nursing education. Prolonged stress can adversely affect students' clinical learning and health (Aedh, Elfaki, & Mohamed, 2015). Dealing with challenging patients, families, relationships with physicians, and poor supervision by staff nurses can result in poor-quality care by nursing students (Papastavrou, Lambrinou, Tsangari, Saarikkoski, and Leino-Kilpi, 2010). On the other hand, overwhelming academic workloads can lead to feelings of anxiety and nervousness, which can result in stress and become crucial for learning, as they affect performance (Rahim, Saat, Aishah, Arshad, Aziz, Zakaria, Kaur, Kamaruddin, & Suhaimi, 2016). Family responsibilities, time constraints, and money worries are common problems encountered by nursing students that affect their academic performance and their ability to continue their education (Ali & El-Sherbini, 2018). Stress among nursing students may have resulted from discrimination by instructors and staff, as observed in the distinction between theory and practice, given that clinical settings employ practices different from those described in theory (Jamshidi, Molazem, Sharif, Torabizadeh, & Najafi Kalyani, 2016).

An optimistic approach aligns with best practices and promotes strength in clinical and non-clinical settings, allowing individuals to cope effectively (McVeigh, Reid, Carswell, Ace, Walsh, Graham-Wisener, Rej, Potes, Atkinson, Edginton, & Noble, 2021). A stress transference method prioritizes the individual's ability to cope with stress over the stress itself. Nursing students manage stress by directing it to someone or something to cope effectively (Rafati, Nouhi, Sabzevari, & Dehghan-Nayeri, 2017).

Related Studies. Stress is frequent among students, particularly in the medical field. Zheng, Jiao, & Hao's (2022) study on The Prevalence of Stress among Nursing Students: A protocol for systematic review and meta-analysis found a low (0.24%), medium (0.35%), and high (0.10%) prevalence, indicating moderate stress levels among interns.

Suresh, Matthews, and Coyne (2013) compare stress and stressors among fourth-year student nurses and newly qualified general nurses in Ireland. The study revealed that fresh graduates and fourth-year students perceived high levels of stress and stressors from excessive workload, working relationships, unmet clinical learning needs, and academic demands during clinical placement. Hospital administrators must promptly address the recurring retention challenges nurses face in clinical settings due to widespread issues.

Yoro, Sumande, Yap, and Saldajeno (2015) reported that nursing students at a private university in Iloilo City often experience high stress levels throughout the academic year and report moderate stress due to workload demands and patient care. The above study aligns with the results of Labrague's (2013) study, entitled Stress, stressors, and Stress Responses of Student Nurses in a Government Nursing School, which revealed that the most common stressors among Filipino student nurses were assignments and workload. These may be attributed to the current nursing curriculum, which

differs from those in other countries.

THE PROBLEM

The main objective of this study is to determine the level of stress and coping strategies utilized by nursing students at the University of Bohol in dealing with perceived stress and anxiety in clinical settings. Specifically, this study sought to answer the profile of the respondents, including age, sex, and year level. Then, it intends to determine the level of stress experienced by the respondents during their clinical exposure in terms of stress from taking care of patients, stress from assignment and workload, stress from lack of professional knowledge and skills, stress from the environment, stress from peers and daily life, and stress from teachers and nursing staff. Next, the study aims to determine the level of coping strategies used by respondents to deal with perceived stress and anxiety during their clinical exposure, including problem-solving, avoidance, staying optimistic, and transference. Finally, it aims to investigate the potential correlation between stress levels and respondents' coping strategies. Furthermore, based on the findings, the study aims to develop a health education plan to address the perceived stress and anxiety among student nurses in the clinical setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational quantitative design, using a questionnaire. The respondents of this study are the officially enrolled Level II, III, and IV nursing students of the University of Bohol who had already completed Related Learning Exposure (RLE) in a clinical setting during their second semester. From a total of 709 enrolled nursing students, a sample of 326 respondents was randomly selected with a 5% percent margin of error at a 95% confidence interval. A modified questionnaire from the standard tool of Sheu, Lin, Hwang, Yu, Hu, and Lou and Sheu, Lin, and Hwang (2002) was used to determine the level of stress and coping strategies utilized by nursing students at the University of Bohol in dealing with perceived stress and anxiety in clinical settings. The questionnaire comprises three main parts. The first part includes the demographic profile: age, sex, and year level.

The second part of the tool used the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Sheu, Lin, Hwang, Yu, Hu, and Lou to identify nursing students' perceived stressors and levels of stress in the clinical setting. It contained 25 items across six subscales, with respondents rating their preferences or degrees of agreement using the scale below.

Scale	Symbol	Descriptive Value	Meaning	Interpretation
4	SA	Strongly Agree	The respondents are very stressed during their exposure in the clinical setting.	High Stress
3	MA	Moderately Agree	The respondents are moderately stressed during their exposure in the clinical setting.	Moderate Stress
2	SLA	Slightly Agree	The respondents are slightly stressed during their exposure in the clinical setting.	Slight Stress
1	DA	Disagree	The respondents are not stressed during their exposure in the clinical setting.	No stress

The third part of the tool was the Coping Behavior Inventory (CBI), developed by Sheu, Lin, and Hwang (2002), to assess the coping strategies nursing students use in the clinical setting. It comprised 15 items across four subscales, and each indicator was measured on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 to 4.

Scale	Symbol	Descriptive Value	Meaning	Interpretation
4	SA	Strongly Agree	The respondents have a very high ability and skills to cope with stress.	Very high coping skills
3	MA	Moderately Agree	The respondents have a high ability and skills to cope with stress.	High coping skills
2	SLA	Slightly Agree	The respondents have minimal ability and skills to cope with stress.	Moderate coping skills
1	DA	Disagree	The respondents have a poor ability and skills to cope with stress.	Poor coping skills

The instrument was assessed for face validity by consulting experts in the field and pilot-tested with 10 respondents who met the same criteria as those in the inclusion criteria. The gathered data were coded and subjected to a Cronbach's alpha test to assess validity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha results in the Level of Stress: taking care of patients(.933), assignments and workload(.842), lack of professional knowledge and skills (.963), the environment (.958), peers and daily life (.900), and clinical instructors and nursing staff (.873) and Level of Coping Strategies: avoidance (.947), problem-

solving (.888), staying optimistic (.706), and transference (.757).

Before conducting the study, the researchers complied with the University of Bohol's Research Ethics Committee's ethical standards and procedures, and the UBREC reviewed the protocol. A study permit was secured, including signatures from the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Dean of the College of Nursing, and the Research Subject Adviser. Following approval, the researchers addressed a letter of intent to the respondents, requesting their voluntary involvement and providing consent while explaining the purpose of the study. The researchers gave specific directions and sent a link to the Google Forms via messenger, ensuring all respondents had access. Once the respondents have finished the questionnaire, the researchers will collect and compile the data. The data will be coded and tabulated before forwarding it to the statistician for further analysis. By preserving the respondent answers, the researchers ensured secure storage and timely deletion of unneeded data, further protecting confidentiality. Ensuring that only the researchers, research adviser, and URC had access to the gathered data while adhering to ethical considerations throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here is a **tightened, publication-ready version** of the findings that **retains the empirical results and integrates the key related studies**, while removing redundancy, narrative excess, and non-essential exposition. The tone and length are appropriate for a **Results and Discussion (Findings)** section of a refereed journal.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents were predominantly aged 20–24 years (82.2%), with females comprising the majority (72.4%). This sex distribution is consistent with nursing's characterization as a female-dominated profession, attributed to gendered perceptions of caregiving roles (Chan et al., 2014; Leach, 2016). Most respondents were second-year students (54.0%), followed by third-year (28.8%) and fourth-year students (17.2%). Previous studies indicate that stress levels among nursing students tend to increase with academic progression, driven by escalating clinical demands and increasing skill complexity (Ribeiro et al., 2020; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022).

Level of Stress

Overall, respondents experienced **slight stress** in the clinical setting (composite mean = 2.31), with notable variations across stress domains. Stress related to **assignments and workload** was rated at a **moderate level**, particularly concerns about low grades in other subjects and pressure to deliver

accurate clinical care. This aligns with earlier findings that academic workload, time pressure, and performance expectations are major stressors among nursing students (Misra & McKean, 2000; Chan et al., 2009).

In terms of **patient care**, respondents reported slight stress due to fear of not being trusted by patients or significant others, and anxiety over sudden changes in patient condition. Trust and effective interpersonal interactions have been shown to significantly influence clinical confidence and care outcomes (Murray & McCrone, 2015).

Stress related to **lack of professional knowledge and skills** was generally rated as slight, particularly unfamiliarity with certain nursing procedures, medical terminology, and patient diagnoses. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that gaps between theoretical knowledge and clinical application contribute to early clinical stress among nursing students (Ajani & Moez, 2011; Abdulghani et al., 2011).

Regarding the **clinical environment**, respondents experienced slight stress related to unfamiliarity with ward facilities and supplies, while familiarity with hospital rules and regulations was not stressful. Similar findings have been reported, emphasizing that environmental unfamiliarity can initially heighten stress during clinical exposure (Zheng et al., 2022).

Stress associated with **peers and daily life** was rated as slight, particularly due to reduced engagement in social and family activities to accommodate clinical demands. However, respondents reported no stress related to peer relationships, indicating supportive group dynamics that foster a positive learning environment (Ravanipour et al., 2015; Shin & Hwang, 2020).

Stress among teachers and nursing staff was rated moderate, particularly concerns about meeting instructors' expectations and a perceived lack of empathy from some clinical staff. High instructional expectations have been identified as significant contributors to student stress, although supportive faculty relationships can mitigate these effects (Hornstra et al., 2018; Froneman et al., 2016).

Level of Coping Strategies

Despite reported stress, respondents demonstrated **very high overall coping skills** (composite mean = 3.29). Problem-focused coping strategies were most prominent, including setting objectives, planning interventions, prioritizing solutions, and actively addressing clinical problems. These findings are consistent with evidence that nursing students who employ active, non-avoidant coping strategies demonstrate greater resilience and professional growth (Labrague et al., 2017; Labrague et al., 2018).

Non-avoidance behaviors were particularly strong, as respondents reported not avoiding difficult tasks, seeking guidance when needed, and taking responsibility for problem-solving rather than deferring to other healthcare professionals. Avoidance has been linked to fear of failure and reduced confidence, which may hinder professional development (Rafati et

al., 2017).

Respondents also exhibited **high levels of optimism**, reflecting a positive outlook and objective appraisal of stressful situations. Optimism has been identified as a protective factor that enhances resilience and adaptive functioning in clinical training contexts (Cadena et al., 2021). Coping strategies related to **transference**, such as rest, sleep, and maintaining physical health, were rated as high, whereas relaxation activities, such as leisure and exercise, were only moderately utilized, suggesting areas for further enhancement of stress-management practices.

Table 1 provides an overview of the coping strategies used by nursing students. In a stress-adaptive strategy, the individual's ability to cope with stress is more important than the stress itself (Shriver & Scott-Stiles, 2000).

Table 1. *Summary of Level of Coping Strategies Utilized by Nursing Students n = 326*

Level of Coping Strategies	Weighted Mean	Descriptor	Interpretation	Rank
Non-Avoidance	3.40	Strongly Agree	Very high coping skills	1
Problem Solving	3.29	Strongly Agree	Very high coping skills	2
Staying Optimistic	3.16	Moderately Agree	High coping skills	3
Transference	2.72	Moderately Agree	High coping skills	4
Coping Strategies Overall Mean	**3.14**	**Moderately Agree**	**High coping skills**	

Overall, the respondents reported a significant number of coping strategies, revealing that non-avoidance is the most used coping strategy among nursing students in the clinical setting, with a weighted mean of 3.40, followed by problem solving, with a weighted mean of 3.29. Avoidance is considered an unhealthy coping strategy, especially if used more often. However, in this study, the statements were reverse-coded, and the findings revealed that respondents strongly agreed with using non-avoidance as a coping strategy. Students often resort to avoidance as a temporary solution to stressors, but it is not sustainable for addressing underlying issues (Shaban, Khater, & Akhu-Zaheya, 2012).

On the other hand, problem-solving, with a weighted mean of 3.29, was interpreted as a very high coping skill. Lazarus and Folkman's Theory (1984) emphasizes that individuals can alter stressful situations by believing in their problem-solving abilities.

Furthermore, transference emerges as one of the less commonly employed coping strategies, with a weighted mean of 2.72, interpreted as high coping skills. Transference is considered an undesirable coping mechanism as it can prevent individuals from developing healthy coping skills and addressing the root causes of stress (Labrague, McEnroe-Petitte, Al Amri, Fronda, &

Obeidat, 2018).

Table 2 revealed that, after subjecting the levels of stress and coping strategies to Spearman's rank correlation test, the computed value was .073 and the p-value was .186. Consequently, the null hypothesis has not been rejected; therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between the level of stress and coping strategies in dealing with perceived stress and anxiety in the clinical settings among nursing students at the University of Bohol.

Table 2. *Correlation between the Level of Stress and Coping Strategies among Nursing Students n = 326*

Variables	Statistical Test Used	Test Value	P- value	Decision	Interpretation
Level of Stress and Coping Strategies	Spearman's Rank Correlation Test	.073	.186	Failed to reject the null hypothesis.	There is no significant relationship between the variables.

Several studies have examined the link between the level of stress and coping strategies in dealing with perceived stress and anxiety in clinical settings. Students cannot eliminate stress, but they can reduce it, so coping skills help preserve their psychosocial well-being. Similarly, Toqan et al (2023) noted that students are aware of potentially useful coping mechanisms, but there is no guarantee that they will use them appropriately.

CONCLUSIONS

Most nursing students at the University of Bohol experience a slight level of stress in the clinical setting. Even though they employed various coping strategies, they still experienced slight to moderate levels of stress. However, the respondents expressed a high level of coping skills that played a crucial role in managing the perceived stress and anxiety during their clinical training. The study's findings resonate with the Neuman Systems Model, highlighting the individual's relationship to stress and their reaction to it. If coping strategies are effective, they will reduce or eliminate the stressors. The respondent's high level of coping skills enables them to immediately create a supportive learning environment, mitigating these challenges and improving their clinical performance, thereby reducing the risk of burnout and adverse health outcomes.

On the other hand, the respondents perceived environmental stress as less common. This finding aligns with the Stress Adaptation Clinical Nursing Theory, which posits that students undergo a process of adaptation. In this study, the findings show that, as a less common stressor, the environment enabled respondents to adapt to changes and become familiar with it quickly.

The respondents reported high levels of stress about the potential impact

of clinical practice on their academic performance in other subjects and on their personal and social lives. This highlights the significant demands and challenges nursing students face in balancing their clinical responsibilities with different aspects of their lives. This aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, in which individuals constantly evaluate their environment to detect stressors, which then elicit emotional reactions and prompt the development of coping strategies. When nursing students are faced with demands or pressure to adapt or change, they will cognitively appraise their resources and ability to respond to the demands of their environment.

Interestingly, the study did not find a significant relationship between the stress level and the respondents' coping strategies. According to the Adaptation Nursing Model, individuals and systems adapt to environmental changes to maintain well-being. Nursing students effectively and efficiently adapt to their environment, utilizing their coping mechanisms regardless of the level of stress they experience, which is a positive finding. This means that the nursing students assess their coping behaviours and intervene to promote more effective adaptation despite the various stressors in the clinical settings.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the various sources of stress that nursing students encounter during clinical practice. It emphasizes the need for support systems, stress-management interventions, and the development of effective coping strategies to ensure the well-being and success of nursing students during clinical training and in their future professional careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The College of Nursing, in collaboration with the guidance office and student services office, enhances support for student nurses. Given the moderate stress levels due to assignments, workload, and concerns about meeting the expectations of clinical instructors and nursing staff, establish support mechanisms explicitly designed for student nurses. This finding can involve providing mentorship programs, support groups, or stress workshop training for colleagues to improve understanding and create a stress-free environment.
2. The University of Bohol nursing students will improve their time management and prioritization skills to balance their studies across all subjects effectively. Given the moderate stress of low grades, enhancing time management skills can help nursing students manage their academic and clinical workload more effectively, making it more organized and detailed. These techniques include prioritizing tasks, setting goals, creating schedules, and maximizing productivity.
3. The University of Bohol nursing students will improve their communication skills by using open-ended questions to encourage

patients to share details, paying close attention to patients' concerns, and showing they are listening by reflecting on what they say. Given the moderate stress of not being trusted or accepted by patients or their significant others, enhancing communication skills can help nursing students gain patients' trust by showing care for their well-being, allowing patients to express their worries and any remaining concerns fully.

4. The College of Nursing, in collaboration with the hospital administration, will strengthen the professional relationship and encourage students to communicate openly and work with healthcare teams to make learning easier and maintain a stable learning environment.
5. The College of Nursing, in collaboration with the University of Bohol Guidance Center, will conduct seminars and symposiums at levels 2, 3, and 4 to adequately address and manage stress, thereby enhancing the students' good mental health.
6. Thus, further research should explore the factors that exacerbate the stress experience of nursing students in the clinical setting, considering the effects of stress on students. Longitudinal studies can examine the effectiveness of specific stress management interventions and coping techniques in mitigating stress among nursing students during clinical practice.

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