



Relationship Between Perceived Stress and Psychological Distress Facing Nursing Students in College of Nursing Gombe, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper is to examine relationship between perceived stress, and psychological distress facing nursing students in College of Nursing, Gombe state. The research design was correlation design. A Research question and one Null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The population was all nursing students of the College of nursing Gombe. The entire students were used without any sampling; this is because the students were not too large to be managed. 'perceived stress scale, and 'Kessler Psychological Distress Scale' were adapted and used as Instruments for data collection. Two experts from the department of Educational Foundation Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi validated the two instruments. The internal consistency of the instruments showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 for Emotional Intelligence scale, and 0.64 for Psychological Distress scale respectively. Two hundred and twenty-five (225) nursing students participated in the study. Male = 34 and female =191 (n=225). Ethics approval was obtained from the College Management. Research Question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation, Pearson's Correlation, was used to address the Hypothesis. The findings of the study revealed that, most of the participants had high level of perceived stress, and were experiencing high degree of psychological distress. Positive correlation was found between perceived stress, and Psychological Distress; it was concluded that the higher the level of perceived stress, the higher experiencing psychological distress among Nursing students. Therefore, it is recommended that further exploration to better understanding of the interrelationships of perceived stress, Psychological distress and coping strategies to help develop students' perceived stress and coping strategies is needed. Inclusion of strategies to enhance perceived stress management in the nursing curriculum which may be beneficial to Nursing Students as this can help to improve their academic and clinical performance.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Psychological Distress & Nursing Students

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Introduction

Psychological distress is described as unique discomforting response by an individual to a specific stressor which results in harm, either temporary or permanent (Jahanara, (2014)). From this definition one can term the psychological distress as a threat to the quality of human life. Therefore, when a demand of an individual vastly exceeds his capabilities, it can also result to psychological distress. Thompson, (2015). clearly indicated that there is a connection between psychological distress and illness. He further found that chronic distress can lead to changes in behaviour and physiological condition. As distress has a physical effect on the body, some

individuals may not distinguish this from other more serious illnesses. Individuals experiencing distress are less likely to seek medical care for a symptom if the symptom is ambiguous (e.g. headache) and they are currently experiencing distress (Schneiderman, Iroson and Siegel, 2005) Most psychological distress issues do not follow a particular pattern, some can continue to intensify and worsen over time if left untreated. When symptoms are transient, it is easier for a person to keep pushing forward without efforts to address the problem. When issues are more consistent, a person may essentially "get used to" thinking, feeling, and behaving a certain way. When issues are severe,

persistent, but related to a distressing experience, it is also often the case that the person will engage in efforts to deny or suppress their difficulties. Moreover, in all of these cases, the person may try to minimize their distress to feel “normal” only to see an exacerbation or future recurrence of symptoms (Akerjordet & Severinsson, 2008)

Seeking professional psychological help continues to become less and less stigmatized, thereby making the thought of seeking help more ‘acceptable’; and once the person has accepted that “something” is wrong, and at least somewhat embraces the idea of seeking professional help, these conditions can be easier to treat. This goes back to the ego-dystonic nature of having the psychological challenge present in the first place. The people who want to be healthy and be free from distress, are more willing to actively engage in therapy in order to make changes (Fernandez, Salamonson & Griffiths, 2012).

Some of the factors lead to psychological distress as advocated by Montes-Berges & Augusto, (2007) are regular exposure to stressful work, environmental condition and this can be influenced by work demands and relationships with colleagues. 'High parental expectations', 'frequency of examinations', 'vastness of academic curriculum', 'sleeping difficulties', 'worrying about the future', 'loneliness', 'performance in periodic examinations' often disturb nursing students in the hospitals (Casey, Fink, Krugman, & Propst, 2014), and they are forced to learn with limited resources and continually care for the growing number of patients in the hospitals. Having workload schedules, receiving physical verbal abuse from patients and patients' relatives, dealing with negative events and experiencing conflicts with other members of the multidisciplinary team including doctors, insufficient staffing and lack or inadequate emotional support from their superiors are the most common factors which nurses and nursing students experience (Clancy, 2014).

In the other hand, McClain, (2010) described perceived stress as a state or outcome of the significance and difficulty in dealing with personal and environmental challenges and when further to discovered that children and adolescents who report high levels of



perceived stress are at high risk for negative outcomes, such as depression. Shino and Kitamura, (2009) described perceived stress as the degree to which a situation in one's life is appraised as stressful and therefore as an outcome of primary and secondary appraisals and also indicated that perceived stress is associated to both anxiety and depression and found that people who scored higher in emotional intelligence scale suffered less subjective stress, experienced better health and well-being, and demonstrated better management performance. High emotional intelligence individuals exhibit good stress management skills and ability to appraise, express and manage their emotions (Cheung, Lee & Yip, 2016).

To further assess the relationship between perceived stress, and psychological distress, the study found a significant inverse relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress. The significant predictors include gender, previous higher education qualification and lack of satisfaction with the decision to enter school. Another qualitative follow up study by McClain, (2010) concluded that, younger dental students reported higher stress than older students and female dental students reported higher stress than males. Thus, it is important to understand specific information about different dispositions in addition to work events in order to make predictions about individual's behavior. Individual differences influence reactions to the same work event, and these differences in reactions lead to different types of behaviors and attitudes (Greenberg, 2017)

Furthermore, this study is one such studies needed to enhance understanding of the degree of perceived stress and psychological distress that Nursing Students are experiencing. Prior to the conduct of this study, the researcher observed that the Nursing Students were experiencing perceived stress and psychological distress challenges when undertaking theoretical study and during professional practice (clinical practicum) which sometimes are served as full staff due to shortage of manpower. It was also known that pressures from within the students' social context, for example, overload of academic and clinical activities, had the capacity to negatively

impact on their ability to succeed in their studies. Inability to cope with these competing demands may lead to stress, which can adversely affect academic performance and may result in withdrawal or deferral in studies (Foster, 2017). Furthermore, it can also assist in improving the students' capacity to deal with stress, which may improve their academic and clinical performance (Jahanara, 2014).

Realizing the importance of possible relationship between Perceived Stress and Psychological Distress Psychologists by Por, Barriball, Fitzpatrick, and Roberts (2011), they found that Nursing Students with higher perceived stress were more Psychological Distress and more incapable of managing emotions that arose from their studies, and went to discover that Nursing Students with high levels of perceived stress were also found to have high symptoms of burnout, could easily recognize anxiety and anger, and could not plan an effective solution to a problem. In addition, the authors recommended the study of relationship between perceived stress and Psychological Distress. Consequently, this study was designed to determine the relationship between Perceived Stress and Psychological Distress in College of Nursing Gombe State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

On personal experience, the researcher observed that people patronizing hospitals and college clinics do complain about the attitudes of Nurses and Nursing students on training towards the patients and patients' relatives, where they lack human relation in terms of hospitality. This problem may be due to over load of academic and clinical activities, the nursing course takes about three years to complete the bulky curriculum for full-time. Further clinical placement or professional practice is undertaken alongside academic learning. The structure of nursing education in the 21st century and lack of workers in the clinical training area may be the sources of additional stress for nursing students. Students are often required to work in addition to studying, these demands can eventually take a negative setback on the students' academic progress, health and psychological upright. During the classroom and clinical training, nursing students



encounter stressful situations and emotional challenges in their academic and clinical training, hence their reactions to patients and patients' relatives are negative. The Nursing Students are supposed to be emotionally and psychologically upright otherwise the patients will be at the receiving end. Thus, it is desirable for nurses and nursing students to have higher emotional intelligence, as this can help them engage with patients, and their family members, as well as with their colleagues. It is against this background, the researcher carried out the study on the relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress among nursing students in College of Nursing Gombe State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study:

To find out the relationship between Perceived stress and Psychological distress among Nursing Students in College of Nursing Gombe State.

Research Question

What is the relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress among nursing students in college of nursing Gombe state?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between Perceived Stress and Psychological Stress facing Students in College of Nursing Gombe State.

Methodology

The research design for the study was non-experimental specifically, correlational design. It is Correlational design because is effective in establishing the relationship between variables that are not manipulated (Mertens in Oranu 2005). The population of the study consisted of all the Nursing Students of the College of nursing Gombe that are currently on training in 2019 academic session. The number of the students was two hundred and twenty-five (225) during the 2019/2020 session. The students included all year 1, 2 & 3, the male were 34 while female were 191. The total number of students in the college as at the time of the study 225 (College open registry, 2019). Due to the small number of the students, the researcher used the entire

population for the study. The number of the subjects under study is not too large, and it can be manageable, there is no need for sampling (Kumar, 2013),

The study used three adapted Instruments namely. The 'Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, (1983) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (KPDS) by (Kessler, Green, Gruber, Sampson, Bromet, Cuitan, Zaslavsky, (2010). The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) measured the participants' level of perceived stress. It is a 10-item scale that is designed to explore the extent to which the participants found their lives uncontrollable, overloaded or unpredictable. Each is rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from '1' (Never), to '5' (Very Often), to indicate how many times a participant had encountered a stressful situation.

The face and content validity was carried out by two experts from the department of Educational Foundation, Abubakar Tafawa University, Bauchi. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, from '1' (Never) to '5' (Very Often), to indicate how many times the participant had encountered a stressful situation. The total score is achieved by combining the score for each question. The results are categorized into three groups, interpreted as follows: a score of '1 to 13' signifies low stress, '14 to 26'



signifies moderate stress and '27 to 50' signifies high perceived stress. This short survey instrument was suitable for the study due to its reliability and shortened version (Cohen, et al, 1983). The reliability of this scale has been ascertained in three different studies (Cohen et al., 1983) showing the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of .84, .85, and .86 respectively and that of the current study is 0.75. The researcher found the scale suitable in all respects, only that a little modification was made in the rating method, the original rated from 0-4 while in this study 1-5 was used, and the reason was only for easy analysis.

The Data obtained was analyzed and evaluated with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V25). Frequency distribution table, Mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive Statistics analysis. The data addressing research question was computed using mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlational (PPMC as suggested by (Pallant, 2016).

Results

The Null hypothesis (H_0) is that there is no significant relationship between perceived stress and Psychological Distress among Nursing Students.

Table1: Correlational between perceived stress and psychological distress (N=216)

Variable	R	df	p	r ²
PS	0.165	225	0.013	27.23%
PD	0.013	225	0.165	1.69%

Note: Pearson's correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level

PS = Perceived Stress, PD = Psychological Distress.

Discussion

Table1 shows that there is relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress. The correlation coefficient revealed the result of $r= 0.165$, $p=0.013$ ($p<0.05$) at two tail test of significance at $df = 215$. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies there is a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress. This indicates that the current study found that there is a relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress, even though it is

week relationship. This means that the higher the scores of perceived stress the higher the psychological distress, which implies that the relationship exist.

The finding is comparable to the findings of Al-Zayyat and Al-Gamal (2014) which found that psychological distress could also be a result of prolonged exposure to perceived stress when not addressed appropriately. Similarly, it is in line with the findings of Cheng, Liou, Tsai, and Chang, (2015) which reported that students tend to have high anxiety level and perceived stress

during examination period which subsequently resulted in psychological distress. Similarly, it is agreed with the study which discovered that, the psychological distress is associated with perceived stress, anxiety and depression (Chernomas & Shapiro, 2013).

Furthermore, according to Rudman & Gustavsson, (2012), nurses in professional practice experience high workload demand, lack of support and conflict with colleagues are also seen to be stressful and result in psychological distress, and they went further to find out that, continuous exposure to perceived stress can lead to study burnout which affects the student's learning ability in class, and their preparedness and competency skills after entering professional practice (Rudman & Gustavsson, 2012).

Conclusion

The study examines the relationship between perceived stress and the psychological distress facing students in the college of nursing Gombe. The study found that there was positive relationship between perceived stress and the psychological distress facing students in the College of nursing Gombe. It is therefore, imperative that College management addresses the causes of perceived stress in order to facilitate effective learning activities.

Recommendations

The followings are some of the recommendations based on the findings of the study:

- i. Based on the finding which showed the relationship of perceived stress and psychological distress, it is recommended to the colleges of Nursing to Identify the causes of perceived stress and psychological distress facing Nursing Students.
- ii. There is need to introduce supportive counselling program in all Colleges and Schools of Nursing in Nigeria for students, so as to manage the perceived stress and psychological distress so as to have better academic performance and psychological wellbeing.



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