Impact of Academic Stress on Help-Seeking Attitudes Among Nursing Students of Kathmandu District

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ABSTRACT

Background

Depression, anxiety and stress are treatable conditions. However, a vast majority of people avoid seeking professional help. Interventions aiming to improve help-seeking attitudes among affected individuals, particularly within academic settings, often demonstrate limited efficacy. This study explores the relationship between academic stress and help-seeking attitudes among nursing students.

Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 300 nursing students in Kathmandu district using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS21) and additional survey questions. Statistical analysis employed chi-square tests to explore relationships between variables.

Results

Findings indicated that 14% of respondents had mild depression, 30% moderate depression, and 8.7% severe depression. Similarly, levels of anxiety and stress were observed, with significant associations between depression and stress related to academics (p-value 0.002). Help-seeking preferences revealed that students were more inclined to seek support from friends or intimate partners.

Conclusions

This study highlights the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students with notable associations to their academia. Importantly, the findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions to address mental health concerns and foster proactive help-seeking attitudes among students. Further research and targeted strategies are warranted to enhance the effectiveness of interventions in this context.

Keywords: academic stress; depression; anxiety; stress; help-seeking attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Depression, anxiety, and stress are prevalent global mental health concerns affecting 1 in 8 people worldwide according to the WHO.[1] Nursing students face higher risk of mental health issues due to intense training and exposure to trauma in clinical rotations.[2,5] Studies consistently show high rates of mental health issues among nursing students globally. In Southeast Asia depression rates were 29.4%, anxiety 42.4%, stress 16.4% with 7-8% reporting current suicidality.[3] In India, medical students grapple with high rates of depression (51.3%), anxiety (66.9%), and stress (53%) particularly in the 5th semester. Female students report higher scores than males.[4] Similar trends are likely in Nepal. Despite high mental health issues nursing students seek help less due to stigma, fear, and unawareness of resources.[6-8] Poor help-seeking behavior exacerbates mental health issues, academic challenges, and dropout risk in nursing programs.[9] This study aims to gauge depression, anxiety, stress, and help-seeking among Kathmandu nursing students.

METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design to examine the mental health status and help-seeking behavior among nursing students across six colleges in the Kathmandu district. Ethical approval was secured from the Institutional Review Committee at Nobel College (Ref No. PHIRC 128/2018), and informed consent was obtained from all participating students. A total of 300 undergraduate nursing students were selected through simple random sampling from the targeted colleges. Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire that covered sociodemographic factors, academic stressors, family history of psychiatric disorders, and help-seeking behavior. Additionally, the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the modified General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) were employed to assess mental health states and help-seeking intentions, respectively. The DASS-21, comprising three subscales, measured levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, while the GHSQ, adapted into a 4-point Likert scale, captured participants' intentions regarding help-seeking from various sources. Data entry and analysis were performed using SPSS version 16, employing descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also employed in this study to explore further associations between mental health indicators and different variables among nursing students. This methodological approach aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the mental health landscape and help-seeking behavior among nursing students, contributing valuable information to existing literature on this topic.

RESULTS

Table 1 outlines key demographic findings. The mean student age was 20.70 years and Hinduism is the dominant religion. There is a higher representation from 1st-year B.Sc. nursing students.

Figure 1 illustrates the assessment of depression, anxiety, and stress levels using standard cut-off points. A significant portion of respondents (38.7%) exhibited a normal level of depression, while 30% experienced moderate depression. Additionally,

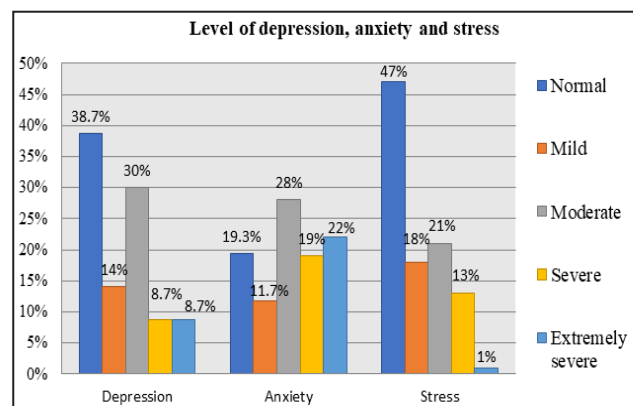| Table 1. Socio demographic variables.	
Variables	**Frequency (%)**
Age	
≤ 18	31 (10.3%)
19 to 20	42 (14%)
> 20	227 (75.7%)
Mean = 20.70	
Religion	
Hinduism	256 (85.3%)
Buddhism	33 (11%)
Others	11 (3.7%)
Education level	
1st year	98 (32.7%)
2nd year	60 (20%)
3rd year	71 (23.7%)
4th year	71 (23.7%)
Accommodation	
Home	166 (55.3%)
Hostel	74 (24.7)
Rented room	60 (20%)
Family income per month	
< 25000	28 (9.3%)
25000-50000	150 (50%)
> 50000	122 (40.7%)

Figure 1. Depression anxiety and stress levels using DASS-21.

8.7% reported severe depression. In terms of anxiety, 19.3% of respondents demonstrated a normal level, while 28% experienced moderate anxiety and 19% reported severe anxiety. The measurement of stress levels indicated that 47% of respondents had a normal stress level, while 21% reported moderate stress, and 13% reported severe stress.

Table 2. Association between depression and relationship problem.

Relationship problem in family/friends	Depression		p -value
	No	Yes	
Yes	8 (6.9%)	148 (80.4%)	<0.001
No	108 (93.1%)	36 (19.6%)	

Table 2 shows a highly statistically significant association (p-value < 0.001) between depression and relationship problems within the family or with friends. This highlights the notable connection between depression and challenges in interpersonal relationships.

Table 3. Association between depression and stress due to academics.

Stress due to academics	Depression		p-value
	No	Yes	
Yes	75 (64.7%)	148 (80.4%)	0.002
No	41 (35.3%)	36 (19.6%)	

In Table 3, a statistically significant association is observed with a p-value of 0.002, underscoring that students experiencing stress due to academic pressures are more likely to have depression. This finding emphasizes a noteworthy association between depression and the challenges posed by academic stressors and workload.

Table 4. Association between socio demographic variables and personal information.

Variables	Stress		p-value
	No	Yes	
Relationship problem in family/friends			
Yes	13 (9.2%)	51 (32.1%)	<0.001
No	128 (90.8%)	108 (67.9%)	
Stress due to academics			
Yes	65 (44.5%)	39 (41.5%)	0.071
No	81 (55.5%)	55 (58.5%)	
Lack of opportunities for leisure activities			
Yes	64 (45.4%)	93 (58.5%)	0.023
No	77 (54.6%)	66 (41.5%)	

Table 4 shows a strong link (p < 0.001) between issues in family or with friends and stress. However, there's no clear connection between stress from academics and overall stress (p = 0.071). On the other hand, there's a noticeable link (p = 0.023) between limited opportunities for leisure activities and stress, indicating that having fewer chances for leisure can contribute to higher stress levels.

Table 5. Association between seeking professional help and reason/barrier behind not doing so.

Variables n=256	Reason behind not seeking help				p-value
	I preferred to manage myself	I was afraid to ask for help or what others would think/Privacy concerns	I didn't perceive the need for it	Others	
Have you ever seen a mental health professional?					
Yes	49 (36.8%)	21 (45.7%)	6 (13%)	14 (45.2%)	0.003
No	84 (63.2%)	25 (54.3%)	40 (87%)	17 (54.8%)	

In Table 5, out of 256 respondents experiencing some form of depression, anxiety, or stress, the p-value for seeking help from a mental health professional was 0.003. This includes exploring the reasons or barriers preventing them from seeking help for personal problems.

DISCUSSION

This study explores the mental well-being of nursing students, revealing insights into the challenges they face and their coping mechanisms. The participants, averaging 20.70 years, present a diverse demographic, differing from a comparable study in Sri Lanka[10] and emphasizing the varied age distribution in academic settings. High levels of academic stress (74.3%) and perceived leisure limitations (52.3%) highlight the intricate hurdles nursing students navigate, resonating with global concerns identified in a Hong Kong study.[11] Utilizing the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21), our findings indicate that 38.7% exhibit normal depression levels and 30% report moderate levels, aligning with cross-cultural similarities found in Sri Lanka[10]. The study emphasizes the crucial role of familial and social networks in student support, with parents being the primary source, in contrast to an Australian study.[12] Exploration of why students may avoid professional help reveals a self-reliant approach (51.7%), differing from a U.S. study[13] and emphasizing cultural influences. Associations between depression and relationship issues, as well as academic stress, mirror patterns identified in Hong Kong[11], emphasizing consistency across diverse academic environments. Positive correlations between depression, anxiety, and stress confirm the interconnected nature of these

mental health dimensions, contributing nuanced insights to the broader understanding of mental well-being in academic settings and advocating for more comprehensive and culturally sensitive support mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of mental health indicators among nursing students. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of academic stress, perceived dearth of leisure activities, and moderate levels of depression. Students primarily seek support from familial and social networks, while self-management remains a prevalent coping mechanism. The interconnectedness of academic, interpersonal, and mental health challenges is evident in the significant associations between depression, anxiety, stress, and relationship problems.

Recommendations

The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among undergraduate nursing students. Given the strong positive relationship observed between these mental health dimensions, holistic strategies are warranted. Root-cause investigations, etiologic studies, and effective interventions should focus on the significant associations with academic stress and limited leisure opportunities. Additionally, future research should explore the contributions of daily stressors, social media, interpersonal skills, and economic factors to develop comprehensive support mechanisms for nursing students' mental well-being.

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