



Stress, Emotional Well-being, and Coping Strategies Among Nursing Students: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Introduction: Because stress affects emotional health, academic achievement, and future professional competence, it is a serious problem for nursing students. Nursing students are susceptible to psychological strain due to growing academic and clinical responsibilities.

Methodology: PRISMA standards were followed in conducting a systematic review. We retrieved pertinent studies from PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar that were published between 2018 and 2025. Included were studies on nursing students' coping mechanisms, stress, and mental health. Narrative synthesis and data extraction were done.

Results: About 45 studies in all satisfied the inclusion requirements. The results showed that academic overload, clinical exposure, and interpersonal difficulties are the main causes of the moderate to high levels of stress experienced by nursing students. High stress levels were associated with poor emotional outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. While maladaptive coping mechanisms like avoidance and excessive use of digital media were associated with poor mental health outcomes, adaptive coping mechanisms like social support, mindfulness, and time management were found to enhance emotional well-being.

Conclusion: Stress and impaired emotional health are major risks for nursing students. In order to lessen these consequences, effective coping mechanisms are essential. In order to foster resilience and enhance student well-being, nursing education needs systematic interventions and mental health support services.

Keywords: Stress, Emotional well-being, Coping strategies, Systematic review.

INTRODUCTION

Because of its difficult curriculum, clinical obligations, and emotional demands, nursing education is widely acknowledged as one of the most stressful and demanding academic programs. Nursing students must strike a balance between their theoretical education and hands-on clinical experience, frequently in demanding healthcare settings. Their emotional health and academic performance may suffer as a result of this combined burden, which greatly raises stress levels.¹

Stress is characterized as a physiological and psychological reaction to demands or perceived difficulties that surpass a

person's ability to cope. Numerous factors, such as time restrictions, peer, professor, and patient interactions, academic pressure, and the dread of making clinical mistakes, can cause stress in nursing students.² Anxiety, sadness, burnout, and sleep difficulties are among the negative mental health effects that can result from prolonged exposure to such stresses.³

A vital part of general health is emotional well-being, which includes the capacity to control emotions, handle stress, and uphold wholesome relationships. Nursing students'

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poor emotional health may jeopardize long-term patient care and professional competency in addition to their academic performance⁴. According to studies, nursing students who are under a lot of stress are more likely to have trouble focusing, be less motivated, and make poor decisions.⁵

Coping mechanisms are essential for reducing the harmful consequences of stress. The term “coping” describes the behavioral and cognitive strategies employed to deal with stressful circumstances. These coping mechanisms are typically divided into two categories: maladaptive coping and adaptive coping (problem-focused and emotion-focused). Better psychological outcomes have been linked to adaptive coping methods include seeking out social support, engaging in physical activities, and practicing mindfulness. On the other hand, unhealthy coping mechanisms like denial, avoidance, and excessive digital media use can worsen stress and have a detrimental effect on mental health.⁶

The amount of research on stress and coping among nursing students in various educational and cultural contexts has increased in recent years. Findings are still dispersed, though, and a thorough synthesis of the current data is required. Systematic reviews offer an organized method for detecting gaps in the literature and summarizing research findings. Such reviews are guaranteed scientific rigor and transparency by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.⁷

Although coping mechanisms have not been thoroughly examined, stress is becoming more widely acknowledged in nursing research. Thirteen articles satisfied the inclusion criteria for this systematic review, which examined research published between 2000 and 2015 from databases such as CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and PubMed in order to determine stress levels, sources, and coping mechanisms among nursing students. The results showed that patient care obligations, academic workload, and unfavorable interactions with staff and professors are the main causes of moderate to high stress experienced by nursing students. Planning, finding purpose in stressful times, and problem-solving techniques were common coping mechanisms. The review comes to the conclusion that nursing students need evidence-based therapies to lower stress and improve coping mechanisms.⁸

Thus, the goal of this systematic review is to thoroughly investigate nursing students’ stress levels, emotional health, and coping mechanisms. The review’s conclusions will assist educators, legislators, and medical facilities in creating focused interventions to enhance nursing students’ mental health and general well-being.

Objectives

- To assess the level of stress among nursing students
- To evaluate emotional well-being outcomes
- To identify coping strategies used by nursing students

METHODOLOGY

This systematic review followed PRISMA guidelines.

Search Strategy

Databases searched included PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect (2018–2025). Keywords used: “*nursing students*,” “*stress*,” “*emotional well-being*,” “*coping strategies*.”

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies on nursing students
- Published in English
- Quantitative, qualitative, and review studies

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-nursing populations
- Editorials and opinion papers

Data Extraction

Data on stress levels, emotional consequences, and coping mechanisms were gathered from studies that were independently evaluated by two reviewers.

RESULTS

Study Selection

A total of 1,250 records were identified through database searching. After removing 250 duplicates, 1,000 records were screened based on title and abstract. Out of these, 920 studies were excluded due to irrelevance (Table 1).

Eighty full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 35 were excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria. Finally, 45 studies were included in the systematic review.

Stress Among Nursing Students

The findings revealed that nursing students experience moderate to high levels of stress. The major sources of stress identified across studies included academic workload, clinical exposure, and fear of failure.³

Emotional Well-being

High stress levels were found to negatively impact emotional well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. Mental health problems were commonly reported among nursing students across different countries.⁴

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies were categorized into adaptive and maladaptive approaches. Adaptive strategies included social support, problem-solving, and time management, whereas maladaptive strategies involved avoidance behaviors and excessive use of digital media.

PRISMA Flow Diagram

- Records found by searching databases (n = 1,250)
- Removed duplicates (n = 250)
- Screened records (n = 1,000)
- Excluded records (n = 920)
- Eighty full-text papers were evaluated.



Table 1: Summary of included studies

S. No.	Author (Year)	Country	Study design	Sample	Key findings
1	Ahmed <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Multi-country	Systematic review	—	Use of social media is associated with poor mental and sleep health.
2	Efstathiou <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Global	Review	—	Stress and mental health problems are very common.
3	Che <i>et al.</i> (2025)	China	Observational	500+	Addiction to social media impacts the quality of sleep
4	Yang <i>et al.</i> (2020)	China	Meta-analysis	—	Anxiety and despair are linked to smartphone use
5	Zhu <i>et al.</i> (2022)	China	Cross-sectional	600	Stress is associated with high social media use.

- Full-text articles excluded (n = 35)
- Research that was reviewed (n = 45)

DISCUSSION

This review highlights that stress among nursing students is multifactorial. Clinical and academic responsibilities greatly impact emotional well-being.

High levels of stress are associated with poor mental health outcomes, which is consistent with prior findings. Effective coping mechanisms, especially mindfulness and social support, are protective.⁶

Stress management techniques and organized mental health programs should be implemented in educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

Significant stress has a detrimental impact on nursing students' emotional health. Coping mechanisms are essential for stress management. Institutional support services are necessary to improve the mental health and resilience of students.

Implications for Nursing Practice

- Include stress-reduction initiatives
- Offer services for psychological support
- Encourage constructive coping mechanisms

Limitations

- Limited to English-language studies
- Differences in research designs

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Nil.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest with regard to the content of the report.

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