

Exploring Coping Strategies for Stress among Level IV Nursing Students in the Clinical Area

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Abstract — This study determined the coping strategies among the level four nursing students in the clinical area. It tackled their age, civil status, monthly family income of parents, occupation, and school category. It tackled the nursing students' coping strategies: time management, peer support, mentorship and guidance, self-care practices, cognitive coping strategies, effective study habits, balancing academic performance, support services, feedback and reflection, and adaptability and resilience.

The study utilized the descriptive research design and a survey questionnaire as the main tools for gathering data. Several statistical tools were used, like frequency and percentage, weighted mean, t-test, Scheffe test, and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance). The study was conducted among level four nursing students in selected private and public nursing schools in Pangasinan, composed of 50 students.

The student respondents were female-dominated in their early adulthood, parents earning an average income, parents having their own employment, and enrolled in private and public schools. The coping strategies utilized by the nursing students are more on the mentorship and guidance, feedback and retention, and adaptability and resilience aspects and lowest on self-care practices, cognitive coping strategies, and utilization of support services. No significant differences across their profile variables. Significant relationships between utilization of support services and category of school.

The profile variables of the nursing students did not affect their coping strategies in the clinical areas. The greater the support the educational institution gives, the better the utilization of support services by the Level IV nursing students as coping strategies in the clinical area. It clearly showed the students utilized many coping strategies in relieving their stresses which focused on prioritizing the assignment or tasks, following strictly on the policies in the clinical area while maintaining good working relationships with their group mates. Most also reward themselves by going for breaks, using their cellphones watching facebook, YouTube TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and many other social media. They even watch nurses experience how to manage difficult patients, how to apply time management for many patients, techniques on proper communication to patient's dilemmas, practices to lessen stress. It is possible to replicate other studies by using different variables.

Keywords — Coping, Strategies, Nursing Students, Clinical Area, Stress, Management, Level IV

I. Introduction

Stress can hinder learning and performance in education. Empirical research supports the view that nursing students suffer from stress in their clinical practice. Without a doubt, clinical practice is a crucial component of nursing education. Students may encounter various challenges and threats in dynamic and complex clinical environments. These could include difficulties in operating high-tech medical equipment, maintaining positive relationships with clinical staff and instructors, managing sudden changes in a patient's condition, and coping with the demands of patients' relatives. When compared to students from other health-related disciplines, nursing students have been reported to experience higher levels of stress and more related physical and psychological symptoms. Students who experience psychological distress are more likely to experience depressive symptoms (Latif & Matnor, 2019). Normally, stress affects even the students because they are exposed to their patients in the clinical setting. They deal with different persons in the hospital, which triggers their stresses, especially when exposed to equipment their patients use.

Due to COVID-19, nursing education has shifted to online classes, challenging nursing students. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced political leaders and universities to take drastic measures to safeguard citizens' and students' lives. As many universities have suspended classroom teaching and switched to online teaching, students' lives have changed completely. Students have become prone to developing stressors, such as fear about physical health and family, and a loss of control related to the change in the educational environment. Nursing students can suffer from high stress during their education program. Specifically, there are two significant sources of stress among nursing students: academic and clinical stressors. The stressors related to academia include heavy assignments, examinations, and workloads. Other sources of stress related to the clinical area for nursing students include a need for more professional nursing skills and unfamiliarity with patients' diagnoses, medical history, or treatment (Majrashi et al., 2021). With the effects of the pandemic, the students were not allowed to have their clinical duties, which made them more stressed. They cannot perform the clinical side of their studies, which contributes to stress since they lack actual exposure to their patients. After the pandemic, they were given the chance to have duties, which brought their stress again since they had to do their assignment and have actual patient care.

Nursing students perceive stress during clinical training and use various coping strategies. Bhurtun et al. (2019) studied stress and coping strategies among nursing students in the clinical area. They found that students perceived moderate to high-stress levels during their clinical training, with problem-solving and transference as the most common coping techniques. Clinical Instructors and nursing staff were causing stress for students because they felt constantly observed and evaluated. The findings guide nursing staff to mentor students during clinical practice and establish a supportive clinical environment. Most often, the students were supervised by their

instructors and other staff in the hospital, especially when they needed more time for their studies and the patient cases they handled.

Latif and MatNor (2019) studied nursing students' stressors and coping strategies in the clinical area. Findings showed that clinical assignments and workload were the main stressors. The religious approach was the most coping strategy applied. According to Pearson's correlation coefficient test, six domains of stressors that nursing students face during clinical practices were found to have a statistically significant correlation with coping strategies. These stressors include caring for patients, dealing with clinical educators/instructors and ward staff, managing clinical assignments and workload, handling peers and nursing students from other colleges, facing a lack of professional knowledge and skills, and coping with the clinical environment. They concluded that clinical assignment was the main stressor among nursing students; therefore, successful activities should be promoted to help them manage the clinical assignments and enhance their knowledge of religion. They encounter stress if they are not ready with answers the instructors ask them. Some students need more time to be ready when they go to the clinical area.

Although the pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is ongoing, nursing students are resuming their on-campus learning and training in clinical settings. However, the pandemic may be causing additional anxiety for nursing students, which could exacerbate their already high levels of anxiety. Marsha'al et al. (2022) conducted a study on coping strategies and anxiety levels among students. They found that female students and students who feared contracting COVID-19 were at a higher risk of anxiety compared to others. The study also revealed a positive correlation between students' anxiety levels and their use of dysfunctional coping strategies such as denial, behavioral disengagement, venting, and self-blame.

Interestingly, students who willingly chose to study nursing were found to use coping planning as a strategy. The participating nursing students showed significant COVID-19-related anxiety upon returning to on-campus learning. The study revealed that some of the students were using coping strategies that were not effective, which led to higher levels of anxiety. This emphasizes the crucial role of universities and nursing faculty members in providing emotional support to the students and ensuring their safety inside and during clinical settings. During the post-pandemic, the students and their parents fear for their lives because they fear they might be transmitted with the virus. However, they used some coping strategies to relieve them of their stress.

Avoidance is a coping mechanism that involves consciously or unconsciously avoiding dealing with a stressor to protect oneself from difficulties. Avoidance coping is when a person avoids dealing with stress rather than addressing a challenge directly, even something you are passionate about or find beneficial. According to Dr. Jennifer Gregg, a licensed psychologist and author specializing in avoidance, avoidance coping is anything we do to avoid feeling our feelings. Sometimes, it involves things that work okay (e.g., watching a funny show when you are upset), and sometimes, it includes things that do not work well (e.g., skipping work when your boss is

upset with you). While avoiding something can relieve immediate anxiety, it has unhelpful long-term consequences. The problem with avoidance coping is that it needs to solve the issue (Goodnight, 2022). There are times when students avoid being stressed, so they find ways as possible to get away from the stress such as watching movies related to the clinical area, talking to their friends and classmates sharing their thoughts and ideas about coping with stress on their duties.

Problem-based coping is a helpful approach when one needs to deal with a stressful situation by making changes in their life. For instance, if someone is in an unhealthy relationship, it might be best to end the relationship rather than simply trying to soothe the emotions of anxiety and sadness. By removing the source of stress, one can effectively resolve the issue. Problem-solving is a valuable technique for identifying the root cause of an issue and developing solutions, especially in work environments. Engaging in relaxation activities and practicing calming techniques can help manage stress and improve coping mechanisms. Coping is a response to psychological stress, usually triggered by changes in our lives. The aim of coping is to maintain good mental health and emotional well-being. Life stressors are often associated with negative events such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or divorce. However, positive life changes such as marriage, birth, moving to a new place, or starting a new job can also cause stress and require coping skills to adapt. Coping strategies refer to the behaviors, thoughts, and emotions we use to adapt to life changes.

People adopt different coping styles, and their effectiveness may vary depending on the individual and the nature of the stressful situation. Coping is a response to psychological stress, usually triggered by changes, to maintain one's mental and emotional well-being. Stressful life events are often seen as negative (such as the death of a loved one, job loss, or divorce), but positive life changes (such as marriage, a new job, or moving) can also be stressful and require coping skills to adapt. Coping strategies encompass the behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that individuals use to adjust to the changes in their lives. There are various coping styles, and their effectiveness depends on the situation and the person. (Semel, 2023). The students can encounter both positive and negative stress. They must learn to adapt to any stress so that they will not be affected because that will affect their performance in the clinical area. Have an informative technique in the clinical area to cope with the stress they might encounter and adapt to it.

Nursing students often experience high levels of stress while in the clinical setting. In clinical settings, academic authorities should identify students' coping strategies with stress and provide training on effective ones. The common causes of clinical stress in nursing students included the fear of unknown events, working with equipment, staff, and faculty incivility, theory and practice gap, and fear of making mistakes and communication with staff, peers, and patients. Stress can negatively affect health, academic performance, program completion rates, and patient care quality. Because nursing students cannot avoid these stressors, students must cope with them; if they cannot manage their stress, it will affect their performance, health, attitude, and role

satisfaction (Rafti et al., 2017). When a student cannot cope with the stress, it can contribute to a worse condition, making them sick and affecting their performance in the clinical area. Some students hardly cope with stressors, which affects their health condition.

Literature Review

This study adapted the Hans Selyes' Stress Theory. The theory stipulates that stress is present in an individual during exposure to a nonspecific demand. He distinguished acute stress from the total response to chronically applied stressors, terming the latter condition 'general adaptation syndrome,' also known as Selye's Syndrome. According to Yong Tan (2018), the stress response can be classified into three phases: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion. When an individual is exposed to a stressor, their initial reaction is to resist the change to maintain homeostasis. However, if the stressor persists, the individual may become exhausted and unable to continue countering the stressor.

Nursing students may experience additional stressors during an epidemic or pandemic, such as fear of contracting the infection. A study conducted (Anxiety and Coping Strategies among nursing students during the COVID-19 Pandemic) by nursing students during the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong showed that nursing students perceived themselves at higher risk of infection. Coping with anxiety and stress is extremely important regarding the influence anxiety and stress will have on health. Nurses involved with the care of SARS patients suffered from a high incidence of depression, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress, while a positive attitude toward taking care of patients with SARS. Nursing education has consistently been associated with anxiety among students. Nursing students experience higher levels of anxiety compared to students in other healthcare disciplines. This can be attributed to various factors such as heavy course loads, stringent examinations, pressure to maintain a high GPA, complex interpersonal relationships, challenges of the clinical environment, and caring for chronically and terminally ill patients. (Savitsky et al., 2020). Students assigned in the clinical area felt more stressed due to the transmission of pathogens that will affect them physically, emotionally, and mentally. With the heavy workloads they encounter since they are also given patience to handle, having assignments and not being ready for duty contribute to their stress.

Common clinical training stressors were assignments, workload, and patient care. Academic training-related stressors included lack of break/leisure time, low grades, exams, and course load. Nursing students use different methods for coping with stress, such as problem-focused coping (dealing with the problem), emotion-focused coping (regulating the emotion), and dysfunctional coping (venting the emotions). Reducing the number or intensity of stressors by revising the curriculum and improving students' coping responses is important to decrease stress levels among students. In addition, mentorship, counseling, and a clinical training environment conducive to learning are crucial to minimizing perceived stress, enhancing productivity and learning, and preventing burnout among nursing students (Chabaane et al., 2021). That is why a clinical instructor always supervises and watches the nursing students to guide them in what they

are doing. Remember, the students are still learning what is taught in the classroom with actual patients. They feel more positive when a clinical instructor oversees them, relieving some of their stress.

II. Methodology

Research Design and Strategy

This chapter presents the research methodology, including discussions on the research design, subjects of the study, sampling scheme, data gathering instruments, data gathering procedure, statistical treatment of data, and tools for data analysis.

Research Design. The study employed the descriptive research method with the questionnaire as a data-gathering tool to determine the coping strategies among level IV nursing students in the clinical area. Descriptive research involves interpreting data's meaning and significance beyond mere gathering and tabulation. (Best, 2015). This description often combines with comparison and contrast involving the measurements, classifications, interpretation, and evaluation.

Population and Locale of the Study. The study's respondents were the level IV nursing students in selected public and private colleges of nursing in Pangasinan, who are presently enrolled and undergoing their related learning experiences in the hospital. They are the selected level four students who voluntarily cooperated with the researcher. It is composed of fifty students (50). To represent the population, purposive sampling was used. It was conducted during the second semester of 2023-2024.

Data Gathering Tool. The study utilized a survey questionnaire based on previous studies and articles related to the study. Part I focused on the respondents' age, sex, civil status, monthly family income, parent's occupation, and school category. Part II focused on the strategies in coping with stress utilized by the level IV nursing students in the clinical area along with time management; peer support, mentorship, and guidance; self-care practices; cognitive coping strategies; effective study habits; balancing academic performance; utilization of support services; feedback and reflection; and adaptability and resilience.

Data Gathering Procedures. Before gathering data, the researcher secured permission from the Dean of the Institute of Graduate and Advanced Studies to conduct the study. When the Institute of Graduate and Advanced Studies was granted permission, the researcher requested and coordinated with the identified Colleges of Nursing in Pangasinan. However, some schools did not cooperate, so the researcher approached friends and their friends to answer the questionnaire. After securing permission from the students, the researcher floated the questionnaire to the respondents.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Strategies in Coping Stress in the Clinical Area among Level IV Nursing Students
Level IV Nursing Students
n=50

Aspect	WM	TR
Time Management	4.02	U
Peer Support	4.09	U
Mentorship and Guidance	4.31	U
Self-Care Practices	3.50	U
Cognitive Coping Strategies	3.77	U
Effective Study Habits	4.22	U
Balancing Academic Performance	4.03	U
Utilization of Support Services	3.94	U
Feedback and Retention	4.24	U
Adaptability and Resilience	4.24	U
Overall Weighted Mean	4.01	U

Legend:

Statistical Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Transmuted Rating
4.50 – 5.00	Always (A)	Highly Utilized (HU)
3.50 – 4.49	Often (O)	Utilized (U)
2.50 – 3.49	Sometimes (St)	Moderately Utilized (MU)
1.50 – 2.49	Seldom (Se)	Slightly Utilized (SU)
1.00 – 1.49	Never (N)	Not Utilized (NU)

Table 1 presents the strategies for coping with stress in the clinical area among level IV students. As gleaned from the table, the highest among the aspects are "mentorship and guidance, feedback and retention, and adaptability and resilience," with a weighted mean of 4.31 and 4.24 or "Utilized." It showed that the respondents used different strategies in the clinical area. Mentoring and guidance reinforce the transfer of advanced clinical knowledge to nursing students. The nursing student should be at the center of the clinical setting, taking an active role in learning by acquiring advanced practical skills that connect to their theoretical knowledge. The primary purpose of mentoring is to support a less experienced student in acquiring the knowledge and competencies necessary to provide professional, responsible, and high-quality nursing care (Mikkonen et al., 2022). Overall, the strategies for coping with stress in the clinical area among level IV students got an average weighted mean of 4.01 or "Utilized." It connotes that the respondents used different coping strategies in the clinical area. In the study of Luoreiro et al. (2024), nursing students may have higher stress levels than other higher education students, amplified in the clinical setting. Sources include assignment work, clinical environment, complex patients, lack of clinical skills, fear of the unknown, gap in practical/theoretical knowledge, and communication difficulties with nurse staff, peers, and patients and their families. Effective stress management is linked to the use of positive coping strategies.

Table 2 Relationship Between the Stress Coping Strategies in the Clinical Area among Level IV Nursing Students and their Profile Variables

Profile Variable	Age	Sex	Civil Status	Monthly Family Income	Occupation of Parents	Category of School		
	N/A	0	-0.049	-0.249	0.005	0.102	r-value	A
		0.8	0.736	0.081	0.971	0.481	sig	
	N/A	0	0.049	-0.23	-0.101	0.084	r-value	B
		0.9	0.733	0.108	0.486	0.563	sig	
	N/A	0	0.4	-0.195	-0.003	0.065	r-value	C
		0.9	0.782	0.174	0.981	0.652	sig	
	N/A	0	0.257	0.06	0	0.103	r-value	D
		1	0.071	0.678	1	0.477	sig	
	N/A	0.1	-0.097	0.047	0.042	0.218	r-value	E
		0.7	0.503	0.747	0.771	0.129	sig	
	N/A	0.1	-0.009	-0.172	-0.093	0.099	r-value	F
		0.4	0.541	0.231	0.519	0.494	sig	
	N/A	0.2	-0.085	-0.139	0.154	-0.077	r-value	G
		0.4	0.556	0.334	0.287	0.597	sig	
	N/A	0.1	-0.016	-0.164	-0.031	0.295	r-value	H
		0.6	0.912	0.256	0.829	.037*	sig	
	N/A	-0	-0.054	-0.25	-0.085	0.249	r-value	I
		0.9	0.711	0.08	0.558	0.082	sig	
	N/A	0	0.06	-0.158	0.002	0.157	r-value	J
		0.9	0.681	0.224	0.986	0.277	sig	
						*Significant at .05 level		

Legend:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A - Time Management | F - Effective Study Habits |
| B - Peer Support | G - Balancing Academic Performance |
| C - Mentorship and Guidance | H - Utilization of Support Services |
| D - Self-Care Practices | I - Feedback and Retention |
| E - Cognitive Coping Strategies | J - Adaptability and Resilience |

Table 2 presents the relationship between the stress coping strategies in the clinical area among Level IV Nursing students and their profile variables.

A significant positive R-value is shown between the utilization of support services and the school category. The positive value indicates a direct relationship, which implies that the greater the support given by the government in the educational institution, the better the utilization of support services by the Level IV nursing students as stress-coping strategies in the clinical area.

When nursing students receive ample support from their schools, they feel more capable of coping. Support services to the students are necessary for their motivation to pursue more in their careers.

IV. Conclusion

The student respondents were female-dominated in their early adulthood, parents earning an average income, parents having their work, and enrolled in private and public schools. The strategies in coping with stress utilized by the nursing students are more on the mentorship and guidance, feedback and retention, and adaptability and resilience aspects and lowest on self-care practices, cognitive coping strategies, and utilization of support services. The profile variables of the nursing students did not affect their coping strategies in the clinical areas. The greater the support the educational institution gives, the better the utilization of support services by the Level IV nursing students as coping strategies in the clinical area.

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