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The Interrelationship Between Emotional Intelligence, Stress, and Coping Strategies Among Undergraduate Nursing Students

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Purpose:

It has been identified that undergraduate nursing students (UGNS) experience a significant amount of stress related to their study or personal life. There were several factors that contributed to stress for UGNS including: academic demands; balancing work, school and home demands; unpreparedness for clinical practice; and interpersonal and health issues (Gibbons, 2010; Meachin & Webb, 1996). On the other hand, coping strategies, which refer to ‘how individuals manage the demand of stressful events’ (Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007, p. 2) may not always be effective in managing stress or is dependent on socio-demographic background (Labrague et al., 2017). In recent years, there had been a growing number of studies focusing on Emotional Intelligence (EI) and its relationship with coping strategies and how these two factors can assist in the management of stress among nurses and nursing students (Enns, Eldridge, Montgomery, & Gonzalez, 2018; Foster et al., 2018; Hamaideh, Al-Omari, & Al-Modallal, 2017). This can be attributed to EI focusing on the recognition of people’s emotional state which can assist in regulating behaviour and solving problems (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI had also been found to assist individuals in coping with environmental demands, improving mood and self-esteem in stressful situations (Ciarrochi, Deane, & Anderson, 2002; Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002). Furthermore, EI as well as coping strategies, had been associated in reducing stress and/or burnout and improving the health of nurses and student nurses, which positively impacts on patient care outcomes (Enns et al., 2018; Landa, López-Zafra, Martos, & del Carmen Aguilar-Luzón, 2008). This study was therefore conducted to measure the level of EI, perceived stress and psychological distress of the participants; to identify the usual coping strategies the participants tend to utilise in stressful situation; and, to examine the interrelationship between emotional intelligence, stress, psychological distress and coping strategies of undergraduate nursing students.

Methods:

A study using descriptive correlational design was conducted on April 2016 among second and third year nursing students (N = 377) in Australia. Self-report questionnaires, which involved collecting information directly from the participants (Taylor, Kermode, & Roberts, 2006), were utilised to collect data in this study. This includes: Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009), Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) (Kessler et al., 2010) and Coping Strategy Inventory – Short Form (Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1989). A demographic survey was utilized to obtain the participants’ socio-demographic information. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis (MRA). Institutional ethics approval was obtained. Completion and submission of questionnaires implied consent.

Results:

This study revealed that most participants had average levels of emotional intelligence ($M = 123.87$, $SD = 12.48$) and were likely to be experiencing moderate to high levels of stress ($M = 20.55$, $SD = 6.06$) and some degree of psychological distress ($M = 14.28$, $SD = 4.91$). Additionally, participants reported preference for utilisation of engagement ($M = 56.33$, $SD = 10.27$), rather than disengagement ($M =$
46.29, SD = 11.36) coping strategies. Moreover, the result of this study also confirmed that a statistically significant positive relationship exists between EI and engagement coping strategies (r = .55, p < .001); disengagement coping strategies and perceived stress (r = .57, p < .001); and, disengagement coping strategies and psychological distress (r = .47, p < .001). Further statistical analysis also revealed that the engagement coping strategies explained 26.2% (F = 46.05, p < .001) variance for EI; while 32.6% of disengagement coping strategies explained the variance for perceived stress (F = 45.3%, p < .001) and 21.3% for psychological distress (F = 26.3, p < .001).

Conclusion:

The result of this study demonstrated the interrelationships of EI, perceived stress, psychological distress, and coping strategies of the participants. The result of this study is significant in the area of nursing education and training. It is able to identify key problem areas that negatively impact student nurses’ health and academic achievements. Since emotional intelligence and coping strategies can be improved through life skills training and be included in nursing units, findings like these are worth considering when developing new nursing curriculum.

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Keywords:
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References:


**Abstract Summary:**

Describes the interrelationship of emotional intelligence, perceived stress, psychological distress and coping strategies; and how each factor influence each other. This study is also able to identify key problem areas that can have a negative impact on the health or academic achievements of nursing students.

**Content Outline:**

1. Introduction
   1. Brief overview of emotional intelligence
   2. Objective of the study
2. Methodology
   1. Design used
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   3. Instruments used
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3. Results
   1. Results of correlation analysis
   2. Results of standard regression analysis
4. Conclusion
   1. Significance of the study
Author Summary: Nerissa is a budding researcher who just finished her master by research degree in May 2018. Her current research interest includes emotional intelligence, stress management and nursing education; while as a registered nurse, her field of interest is mental health. Through her research, Nerissa hopes to assist those in the education sector, design nursing curriculum that incorporate life skills that students can utilise in managing stress.

Author Summary: Debra’s research focuses on conducting applied research on strategies that aim to enhance healthcare outcomes and nursing education, including the process of communication between nurses and patients. Research has been in areas such as bedside nursing handover, motivational interviewing after acute stroke, as well as evaluation and application of new interventions in emergency and cardiac care.

Author Summary: Sharon has many years of experiences in research and specialises in mixed methodology. Sharon’s research interests includes: Models of care; patient experience; innovation in patient care; nursing education; mixed methods research in nursing and health projects. Experienced in a range of qualitative and quantitative methods.
Author Summary: Gayelene coordinates and teaches mental health in the Bachelor of Nursing & Midwifery programs in the College of Health & Biomedicine. Her research interests include mental health, peer support, and medication adherence.