

**Sigma's VIRTUAL 31st International Nursing Research Congress (Wednesday, 22 July - Friday, 24 July)**

## **Connecting Emotional Health, Hope, and Healthy Habits in Undergraduate Nursing Students**

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**Purpose:** Professional nurses often have poor physical and mental health (Melnyk et al., 2018; Schooley, Hikmet, Tarcan, & Yorgancioglu, 2016). Considering that the development of healthy habits before entering the nursing workforce may improve the overall health of future nurses, the research team wanted to examine the constructs of emotional health and health habits of nursing students to identify areas for potential intervention.

Anxiety and depression often surface in nursing students (Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell, & Riley, 2017; Turner & McCarthy, 2017). However, healthy nutritional and physical activity habits as well as an individual's level of hope can improve or prevent anxiety and depression, and self-efficacy often directs the degree to which a person develops healthy habits (Griggs & Crawford, 2017; Von Ah, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2004). Studies have found that levels of hope and self-efficacy can be increased through interventions (Barkley & Fahrenwald, 2013; Weis & Speridakos, 2011).

**Methods:** Our research team is conducting a longitudinal study on the health of nursing students enrolled in a bachelor program at a university in the Southeastern United States. Findings for the current presentation are from the first timepoint of the study. An electronic survey was administered to nursing students in the professional component

of the degree program (juniors and seniors). Due to the length of the survey, a planned missing data design was implemented (Rhemtulla & Little, 2012). The survey included measures for anxiety (Generalized Anxiety Disorder 2-item screener [GAD-2]), depression (Patient Health Questionnaire 2-item screener [PHQ-2]), health habits (EAT III), the Goal-specific Hope Scale adapted to focus on health goals (Health-specific hope scale [HSHS]), the Health Self-efficacy Scale, and the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale. Descriptive statistics, with measures of central tendency, and correlations were evaluated.

**Results:** Most nursing students who completed the survey ( $N=278$ ) identified as female (89.2%) and Caucasian (73.1%), with 14.7% Black, 3.9% Hispanic, 3.6% Asian, and 3.6% multiracial/ethnic. The mean age was 22.91 years ( $SD=5.28$ ). More than half (52%) were Seniors.

The GAD-2 and PHQ-2 were each administered to 257 respondents; 157 screened positive for GAD and 68 for depression. Both the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 had significant negative associations with practices in physical activity self-management (encouraging oneself to be physically active), health self-efficacy (in the areas of physical activity and nutrition), and overall body satisfaction.

The HSHS had significant positive associations with practices in physical activity self-management, health self-efficacy, overall body satisfaction, healthy weight control, and total physical activity levels. There was a significant negative association with unhealthy practices for weight control.

**Conclusions:** The nursing students at this university with higher levels of health-specific hope practice more healthy habits than do the students with higher levels of anxiety and depression. Many nursing students at this university potentially have anxiety, and some potentially have depression. Because hope and self-efficacy can be increased, interventions can be developed to ultimately result in healthier nursing students, and thus, future nurses.

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**Title:**

Connecting Emotional Health, Hope, and Healthy Habits in Undergraduate Nursing Students

**Keywords:**

Emotional health, Healthy habits and Nursing student health

**Abstract Summary:**

This study investigated emotional health and health habits of undergraduate nursing students at a university in the Southeastern U.S. Healthy habits had significant positive associations with health-specific hope and significant negative associations with anxiety and depression in the students. These findings will inform future interventions to increase hope and self-efficacy.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Graves is a nursing educator, Director of Special Projects and Evaluation, researcher, author, and faculty coordinator of the Interprofessional Culinary

Medicine program at the University of South Alabama. Dr. Graves enjoys working closely with students and is striving to improve the health of nursing students, and future nurses through her research, ultimately improving patient safety.

Second Author

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**Author Summary:** Professor and Associate Dean for Research, Development, and Evaluation. Research and clinical practice expertise is related to obesity prevention and management. Has had a strong research interest and focus on obesity management.

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**Author Summary:** Susan G. Williams PhD, RN is a faculty member at the University of South Alabama College of Nursing and is part of an inter-professional team of researchers focusing on a culture of self-care and wellness in the nursing program. She finished her PhD in 2015. Her research focus prior to this study has been related to parental weight related teasing in nursing students, perceived stress, stressful life events, cortisol, depressive symptoms, bullying, and adolescents.

Fourth Author

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**Author Summary:** Nursing educator for the past 15 years. Currently serves as the Dean for the College of Nursing. Co-Author of a textbook, Author/co-author of over 20 published articles in peer-reviewed journals. Research focus relates to healthy lifestyles.

Fifth Author

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**Author Summary:** Matt Campbell, PhD is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Health Informatics program in the School of Computing at the University of South Alabama (USA) in Mobile, AL. Before entering academia, he worked in software development and technology consulting. His research has been published in numerous journals and conference proceedings and he has received funding through grants from the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Central Intelligence Agency.

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**Author Summary:** Caitlyn Hauff is currently an Assistant Professor of Health Promotion at the University of South Alabama. Dr. Hauff has a Ph.D. in kinesiology with a specialization in the psychosocial aspects of weight and physical activity from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Hauff's line of research focuses on sociological and psychological aspects related to the body. Dr. Hauff's passion lies in finding ways for individuals to embrace and accept bodies of all shapes, sizes, and colors.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Thomas Shaw is an expert in the area of survey research. He is currently the Director of the USA Polling Group. Formerly, he was a Senior Research Associate and also Associate Director of the Greater Cincinnati Survey at the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Sittig has a PhD in Biomedical Informatics and is an Assistant Professor of Health Informatics. His research interest the area of consumer health informatics, where he focuses on digital health solutions to engage patients.

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**Author Summary:** My research interests revolve around the intersections of culture and individual differences to understand real-world problems. A central premise of my program of research is that the most accurate and complete picture of any real-world problem can only be obtained by analyzing the systemic and individual-level variables. Because my background is in college counseling centers, many of the real-world problems I am trying to address are related to college student populations.