

Self-Esteem and Academic Stress among Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

Background

Stress and self-esteem are common issues that everyone has to cope with at some time in their lives and they could also affect other things going on in a person's life. Academic stress is a psychological condition often experienced by college students as, to some extent, being multidimensional variables. Among others are self-esteem and psychological well-being which are considered to have influences in explaining why college students experience stress.

Objective

The objective of this study was to assess the self-esteem level and academic stress among the nursing students.

Method

This is a cross-sectional study carried out in 2012. Total respondents were 190 nursing students selected randomly from Kathmandu University. Academic stress was assessed using 30-item Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS) and self-esteem was assessed using 10-item Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. Information was collected through the self-administered questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 16 software. Simple statistics measurement, percentage, means, correlation was used for the data analysis.

Result

This study shows mean age of the respondent's was 20.44±2.67 years. Majority (88%) of students getting financial support of less than NRs 6000 per month and 64% have low perceived family support. This study found mean score of self-esteem and academic stress was 11.9 and 18.4 respectively. Further, nearly 78% students have low self-esteem and 74% have high academic stress. Significant variables for high academic stress and low self-esteem were lower age, lower education and low perceived family support. Lower financial support has also high academic stress.

Conclusion

Nursing students have low self-esteem and high academic stress. Intervention to lower the academic stress and increase the self-esteem should be carried out so that the learning of students will be efficient.

KEY WORDS

Academic stress, nursing students, self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress among college students has been a topic of interest for many years. Stress is defined as a mental or physical tension or strain.¹ Self-esteem is an important personality trait for healthcare professionals including nursing.² Self-esteem is overall evaluation of one's worth or value and an important predictor of stress coping. Higher stress levels may result in reduction of self-esteem. High self-esteem results in more active and effective coping.³

The students' pre existing level of self esteem strongly contributes to successful or maladaptive adjustment to problem. Student with high self esteem shows self confidence and positive expectations in new situations. A new learning environment may be seen as just another challenge and the student will actively participate in learning new behavior. In contrast, a person with low self esteem consistently demonstrates negative feelings about one self and is pessimistic in new situations.⁴

Erikson identified self-esteem as a function of identity development that results from successfully addressing the tasks associated with each of the developmental stages of life. According to him one's sense of developing, growing and confronting lives tasks leads to feelings of worth.⁵ Some researchers showed that self-esteem remains stable or increases by increasing of individual's age, and some researcher discuss that self-esteem decreases, and some of the authors reveal that there is a U-shaped relationship between age and self-esteem.⁶

On the other hand stress is a common phenomenon experienced by every person and has been more and more complex in modern time due to rapid development of technology resulting in the continuous high expectation in the life of the individuals.⁷ Different groups of populations and professionals use different strategies to cope with the stressed experienced. If the stress is not properly coped, it may lead to the initiation of frustrations resulting in to the nervous breakdown/mental ill health etc. Study shows early stress management can help control these illness as well as help individual improve self esteem, gain control over their lives and enjoy life more fully.⁷

Producing healthy nursing personnel is a part of human resource planning. But, many factors may be the causes of academic stress and that lead to low self esteem of students during the study period. The purpose of this study is to assess self esteem level and academic stress among nursing students and also factor correlated with academic stress and self esteem.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional study carried out in 2012 in Kathmandu University, School of Medical Sciences. Total number of students enrolled in the school of medical

sciences was 300. For the purpose of this study 190 students were selected randomly from all three groups of students Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL), Bachelor in Science in Nursing (B.Sc.) and Bachelor in Nursing Science (BNS) nursing students. For the data collection self administered questionnaire was used.

Academic stress was measured using Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS).⁸ It consisted of 30-items. This scale has already used and validated in Nepal.⁸ Reliability consistency of this scale measured through alpha reliability was 0.70 in this study showing the satisfactory. The subject has to select one out of two alternative responses (*yes* and *no*) for each item of the scale. All *yes* responses are given one point each and summed-up to get total stress score. In this study academic stress was categorized as low stress (15 and below) and high stress (16 and above).

Self-esteem was assessed with the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE).⁹ The RSE is the most commonly used and well-validated measure of global self-esteem. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from one (not very true of me) to five (*very true of me*).¹⁰ Which is later changed to 3-point scale ranging from one (*not very true of me*) to three (*very true of me*). Scoring was accomplished by summing responses to the questions and mean score. Higher mean score indicates high level of self esteem. The alpha reliability of the RSE was 0.75 in this study. In this study respondents who obtained below 15 score were considered low self esteem level and those who were obtained more than 16 have were considered as high self esteem.

Ethical approval for this study was taken from Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences, Institutional Review Committee (IRC) Dhulikhel. Purpose of the study was explained to the participants and an informed verbal consent was obtained from all the participants before filling the questionnaire.

In this study educational back ground is classified as Bachelor and Certificate level, type of family is classified as nuclear and joint family, perceived family support is measured by putting as weak and strong option directly based on their perception. Residency of respondents was taken as hostel and out of hostel. Financial support was measured by amount of money received from family members per month and dichotomized as less than NRs 6000 or more than it.

The questionnaire was pretested among nursing students of other nearby college. The questionnaire was distributed using lottery method to the students in the classroom and returned back in the presence of researcher. There was no problem of drop out and incomplete response. Data entry and analysis was carried using SPSS version 16. Percentage, mean, and correlation statistics are used for data analysis.

RESULTS

More detail information about the demographic information of the participants are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents n=190

Variables	Number	%
Educational Level		
Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL)	53	27.9
Bachelor of Nursing	137	72.1
Age		
16-18	46	24.3
19-21	73	38.4
22-24	58	30.5
25-27	13	6.8
Mean age	20.44±2.67	
Ethnicity		
Brahmin/Chhetri	97	51.1
Newar	63	33.1
Janajati	30	15.8
Religion		
Hindu	164	86.3
Other than Hindu	26	13.7
Type of Family		
Nuclear	146	76.8
Joint	44	23.2
Marital Status		
Unmarried	182	95.8
Married	8	4.2
Residency		
Hostel	121	63.7
Out of Hostel	69	36.3
Financial Support		
< Rs. 6000	168	88.4
≥ Rs. 6000	22	11.6
Perceived Family Support		
Weak	122	64.2
Strong	68	35.8

Self Esteem and Academic Stress of the respondents

Table 2 summarizes the self esteem and academic stress of respondents. Mean score of self esteem and academic stress was 11.9 ±6.0 and 17.4 ±4.1 respectively. Cut off point for low and high self esteem as well as low academic stress and high academic stress was taken as 15 arbitrarily, which is the midpoint of the theoretically possible score range (0-30). Based on this point, 78 % participants have low self esteem and 74 % participants have high academic stress. Pearson correlation between self esteem and academic stress was -0.58 and which was statistically significant. It shows there is strong negative correlation between self esteem and academic stress in this study.

Table 2. Self esteem and academic stress of the respondents n=190

Variable	Self Esteem	Academic Stress
Mean (SD)	11.9±6.0	18.4±4.1
Minimum Score	4.0	1.0
Maximum Score	27.0	28.0
Cut off point for low/High	15.0	15.0
High	22.1%	74.2%
Low	77.9%	25.8%
Correlation between self esteem and academic stress	-0.58*	

*is significant at the 0.01 level

Association between study variables with self esteem and academic stress

Table 3 shows the correlation of demographic variables with self esteem and academic stress. Significant correlation was found between educational level, age and perceived family support.

Higher the academic level higher the self esteem, higher the age higher the self esteem and perceived family support has high self esteem. On the other hand, lower the age, lower the education and less perceived family support is related high academic stress. Further, lower the financial support has higher the academic stress.

Table 3. Association between demographic variables with self esteem and academic stress n=190

Variables	Self Esteem	Academic Stress
Educational Level	0.148*	-0.161*
Age	0.135*	-0.131*
Religion	0.009	0.078
Residency	0.089	0.100
Financial Support	0.002	-0.137*
Perceive Family support	0.191**	-0.199**
Family type	-0.101	0.099

*Pearson's Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Pearson's Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

Stress in nursing students is an area of growing concern and it may result in psychological distress, physical complaints, behavior problems and poor academic performance. Present study was carried out to assess self esteem level and academic stress among nursing students and factor correlated with academic stress and self esteem.

This study found self esteem level was low and academic stress was high among Nepalese nursing students. Present study found that only 22% students have high self-esteem and 74% students have high academic stress. This finding is little bit different with the findings of the study conducted by Ahamad which found that 86% of the study subjects had

high or normal self-esteem and 14% had low self-esteem.¹¹

Result of this study shows academic stress and self-esteem is inversely correlated. Many other study findings support these findings.¹²⁻¹⁷ But, some study findings show there is not significant relationship between stress and self-esteem.¹⁸

This study found bachelor level students have high self-esteem than Certificate level students, in other words higher the education higher the self-esteem. This finding is supported by other studies too.^{19,20} In contrast; a study finding shows the majority of PCL nursing students have high level of self-esteem. Difference in self-esteem was insignificant among the first, second and third year PCL nursing students.²¹ But present study does not compare the self-esteem among the nursing students of different years.

This study found lower the education higher the academic stress. This finding was supported by past research findings of Wintre and Yaffe.²² Contrast to these findings, Elias and colleagues' stated medical students and final-year students were more likely to experience higher levels of stress compared to the other students.²³ This may happen because the first-year students are able to adapt to the new environment fast during university life transition described by Towbes and Cohen.²⁴ This may be due to the higher level of university education which causes more academic stress or their consideration about their job opportunities as they complete the study.²⁴ Another study result demonstrated a significant difference occurs between younger and older students on Perceived Stress Scale. Academic stress is higher in younger students than older students as younger students are not that much adjusted to academic stress of university as seniors are.²⁵

Finances can be a strain for the students. A study found that financial concerns cause significant stress for graduate students and produce 19% high levels of stress.²⁶ Another study in Malaysia by Aniza Abdul Manaf found that 58.7% and 43.3% perceived stress due to financial problem and family conflict respectively.²⁷ This study also found that those students supported financially less than Rs 6000/month had significant high stress. This finding is also supported by finding of the study done in India, which shows financial problem as stress factors by 50% and 60% by adolescence girls of Hyderabad and Hisar city respectively.²⁸ In the same

way, the findings regarding family conflict were 47.5% from Hisar city and 72.5% from Hyderabad city.²⁸ This study also shows students having high perceived family support have high self-esteem and low academic stress.

Despite all the sources of stress in the academic environment, the future of the students depends mostly on high academic performance. It is estimated that 10 to 30 percent of the students experience academic related stress that affects their academic performance.^{7,8} Studies illustrated that self-esteem levels are high in childhood, drops during adolescence, rises gradually throughout adulthood, and declines sharply in elderly.²⁹

Limitation of the Study

Like many other studies, this study is not free from limitations and findings of this study should be interpreted based on these limitations. Firstly, this study is a small cross-sectional study carried out in one academic institution and findings of this study cannot be generalized to all the nursing students of Nepal. Secondly, cross-sectional nature of the study may not establish the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Thirdly, cut off point used for low and high academic stress is arbitrary in this study and its findings should be interpreted accordingly. Fourthly, this study does not compare the academic stress and self-esteem between different years of students within the same level.

CONCLUSION

This study found nursing students have high academic stress and low self-esteem. Variables significantly related with high academic stress and low self-esteem was lower the age, lower the education and low perceived family support. Findings based on this study cannot be generalized and there should be further study to know the real cause of low self-esteem and high academic stress among the Nepalese nursing students so that it will help to get the quality nursing education in the coming days.

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