




Chapter 8

Self-Care Practices of Third-year Student Nurses at a University in Johannesburg

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Abstract

Nursing students encounter stressors associated with nursing education, including demanding academic workloads, clinical rotations, emotional exposure to patient care, anxiety about grades and assignments, and financial problems for others. The article investigated third-year student nurses' self-care practices at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling. A demographic questionnaire and the self-care activities screening scale (SASS-14) were combined as the data collection tool. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The study revealed that a considerable majority of student nurses sleep less than 7–8 hours daily, consume insufficient nutritious food and water, rarely engage in physical activities, and need more time for self-connection and health examination. According to these findings, nursing students must prioritise self-care.

Keywords: *Self-care, practices, University, student nurses*



Introduction

Nursing is a physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding field that addresses many patient situations. Nurses and nursing students see everything, from a woman giving birth to informing a cancer patient that their condition is in remission to end-stage heart failure and severe injuries (Tachias, 2018:5). Nursing students often find themselves caught in a whirlwind of demanding academic workloads, clinical rotations, emotional exposure to patient care, anxiety about grades and assignments, and financial problems for others (Slemon, Jenkins & Bailey, 2021:1). However, amidst this demanding lifestyle, their well-being often takes a backseat (Younas, 2017:1). The combination of intense coursework, clinical rotations, emotional exposure to patient care, anxiety about grades and assignments and financial problems can lead to emotional and psychological distress, fatigue and decreased focus, resulting in student nurses not prioritising self-care. Self-care is crucial in nursing practice and is fundamental to the well-being of human beings, patients, and nurses. However, nurses and student nurses tend to focus more on the self-care of their patients and regularly pay little or no consideration to their self-care (Younas,2017:137). Caring for others' health is as important as caring for oneself. Inability to do that can result in one being unable to provide care and compassion for others to a maximum capacity (Nkabinde-Thamae, 2021:9-10). Although nursing students may be informed about the significance of implementing self-care, research indicates that there is little to no self-care practice (Younas, 2017:144). Furthermore, despite the significance of self-care in the lives of student nurses, no curriculum in South Africa makes provision for self-care practice integration, which is potentially due to historical factors where the centre of nursing was on patient care rather than on nurses' self-care, thus highlighting the need for further investigation to inform evidence-based interventions. This research aimed to investigate the factors that influence self-care practices among nursing students, describe currently identified self-care practices and ways in

which they can be best implemented by student nurses, and provide recommendations to enhance and maintain self-care.

Research Design and Methods

A quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach was employed in this study.

Setting

The study was conducted at a university in Johannesburg. Johannesburg is the largest city in South Africa and is located in Gauteng Province. The university is a public tertiary institution offering over 200 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with a maximum of 50 first-year nursing students per year.

Study population and sampling strategy

The population for this study included all student nurses studying to become professional nurses at a university in Johannesburg, South Africa. The study's target population included only third-year student nurses registered at the university, owing to their familiarity with the programme's demand and exposure to clinicals rather than 1st- and 2nd-year nursing students. This study utilised an accessible population within a reasonable reach of the researcher willing to consent to participate.

The sample for this study was 30, which was derived from the target population of 3rd-year student nurses, which was assumed to be 39. An electronic poster including the researcher's details, the title of the study, who can participate, and important information about the study was created to recruit the study participants.

Data collection

In this study, the researcher collected data using questionnaires to collect information from participants about a study variable. These questionnaires were administered face-to-face by the

researcher at a venue organised by the researcher, which was accessible to the respondents. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section A, which consists of demographic questions, and the self-care activities screening scale (SASS-14), which is Section B. The researcher developed a demographic questionnaire. Permission was sought and granted to use the second questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire comprises five questions, including age, gender, year of study, field of study, and residency. This self-care activities screening scale (SASS-14) consists of 14 questions and four fundamental dimensions, including health consciousness, nutrition and physical activity, sleep, and intrapersonal and interpersonal coping skills, measured on Likert scales.

This instrument's face validity was established by its source, which was determined by the measure of internal consistency, where the same variable was measured throughout. However, face validity was not established, as there was no pilot study. The construct validity of this instrument was established when self-care indicators among professional nurses were assessed (Muhlare et al, 2021:17). Potential bias pertaining to interviewer-administered questionnaires could be social desirability, and this bias was, to the best of the researcher's ability, mitigated by ensuring patient comfort and anonymity.

Data analysis

The study used descriptive statistical analysis of the respondents' demographic data and data collected from Section B of the questionnaire. The statistical mean, median, and mode of the data collected were calculated. The collected data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed. The data were summarised, and continuous variables such as age were reported as the mean and median. Frequencies and percentages were calculated based on the number of valid responses for categorical data.

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval from the Department of Nursing Science Committee (DRC), the Research Ethics Committee with 02A, and the Head of Department at the University, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines.

Results

Only 28 third-year nursing students eventually participated in the survey, and the response rate was 72% for the entire target population.

Demographics

The respondents' demographic data are displayed in Table 1. All respondents were female (100%) and most were off-campus residents (64%) and between the ages of 19 and 24 years (86%).

Self-care activities screening scale (SASS-14)

The study revealed that 50% of the student nurses rarely slept 7–8 hours a day, and most of them did not eat nutritious food or drink adequate water (82%). The study further revealed that most student nurses rarely engage in physical activities (61%), with 11% reporting that they never engage in it. In addition, 71% of the student nurses needed more time to connect with themselves and others. Furthermore, most student nurses rarely examined their health (58%), whereas 3% reported that they never examined their health.

Table 1: Demographic data

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| 19-24 | 24 | 86% |
| 25-30 | 4 | 14% |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 28 | 100% |
| Male | 0 | 0% |

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Residency | | |
| Off-campus | 18 | 64% |
| On-campus | 10 | 36% |
| Year of Study | | |
| 3 rd year | 28 | 100% |
| Field of study | | |
| Nursing | 28 | 100% |

Table 2: SASS-14

| Self-care | Correlation with age |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Health Consciousness | 0.348, |
| Healthy Diet | r = 0.305 |
| Hydration | r = 0.135 |

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings revealed the various self-care practices that the respondents engaged in, which were classified into four dimensions: health consciousness, physical activity, diet or nutrition, sleep, and intra- and interpersonal coping skills. These dimensions encompassed a broad spectrum of self-care activities that respondents reportedly engage in to care for their physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Health consciousness

The findings suggest that 86% of student nurses are always and very frequently alert to changes in their health, but only 39% always take a step toward examining their health. This could indicate a need for increasing recognition of the importance of managing health in the lives of student nurses.

Nutrition, hydration and physical activities

According to the statistics, most student nurses participate in physical activities infrequently (32%) or never (11%), with 29% doing so occasionally. Furthermore, most student nurses (54%) reported seldom consuming three portions of fruit and two servings of vegetables daily, whereas 18% reported never doing so. The more health-conscious the student nurses are, the more likely they are to follow a good diet and drink adequate water. However, the data suggest a good trend in student nurses' hydration, with 50% reporting consuming eight glasses of water daily. Students often overlook physical exercise and nutrition for a variety of reasons, including academic pressures, time restrictions, restricted budgets, and a lack of awareness, among others.

Sleep

The study's findings suggest a positive trend in respondents' perceived quality of rest. According to the results, 70% of the respondents stated that they achieved the quality of rest, whereas 30% rarely achieved it.

Intra- and interpersonal skills

According to the study's findings, a considerable majority of student nurses (50%) reported acquiring new skills, with 32% doing so on occasion, such as playing an instrument or participating in sports, cooking, practicing a new language, etc. This research indicates that student nurses may be interested in pursuing personal interests or hobbies in addition to their academic-related duties. Furthermore, a significant majority of student nurses usually find opportunities to connect with themselves and occasionally participate in community projects.

Limitations

The study had a limited sample size, and only females participated, which may limit the generalizability of the findings and misrepresent sex. The self-care experiences of male and

female student nurses may differ because male student nurses may face more pressure than female student nurses do, such as pressure to adhere to traditional masculine norms. Future research should use inclusive sample strategies to capture the varied perspectives of male student nurses. Furthermore, the study was limited to one university and hence may not reflect nursing students in other regions.

Recommendations

Further Research: intervention studies where a specific self-care programme can be implemented to inform practice and where there is a larger sample including males to promote representativeness.

Promote Self-Care Education: offering workshops and seminars that focus on practical ways or strategies for managing stress, exercise, nutrition and hydration; improving sleep; and maintaining well-being. In practicality, this refers to integrating self-care and wellness modules where fitness classes can be offered.

Integrate Self-Care into Curriculum: includes self-care modules in the nursing curriculum that emphasise the importance of self-care practices for students. One of the studies revealed that nursing educators can incorporate holistic self-care interventions into their curriculum over five weeks with Week 1 focusing on sleep hygiene, advising students on nighttime habits, and establishing a sleep-friendly workplace. Week 2 focuses on good eating habits, offering quick meal options, and promoting nutritious snacks. In Week 3, the students can learn about exercise and hydration, as well as the importance of stretching and eating enough protein. Week 4 can cover aromatherapy, describing essential oils and their applications, and lastly, Week 5 can end with teaching positive affirmations to increase self-esteem and professional achievement. This can improve the physical activity and nutrition of the patient (Green, 2019:231).

Provide Accessible Resources: Make available mental health resources such as counselling services, support groups, and

online platforms where student nurses can access information and support.

Conclusion

This study investigated the self-care practices of nursing students. The findings emphasise the relevance of health consciousness in implementing self-care practices, as well as social support in nursing students' self-care practices as part of the curriculum. However, the drawbacks of this study, notably its gender disparity and restricted geographic scale, highlight the need for more research. To gain a better understanding of self-care habits among nursing students, future research should look at a wider, more varied population, including male students as well as students from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Future research should investigate self-care habits in various geographic situations, such as urban vs. rural areas and developed vs. developing areas. Longitudinal research should be conducted to investigate changes in self-care habits during nursing education and professional practice.

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