



Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

**STRESSORS AND COPING STRATEGIES DURING CLINICAL
PRACTICUM AMONG UNIMAS UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS**

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Stressors and Coping Strategies during Clinical Practicum among
UNIMAS Undergraduate Nursing Students.

AT
UNIMAS

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the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nursing is known as a stressful profession due to the complex job demands and needs. Nursing students often encounter various types of stressors during clinical practice, and these stressors could lead to negative impact on learning and performance, coping strategies are crucial to employed. **Objectives:** This study aimed to identify the main stressors perceived by the nursing students and determine the coping strategies used to mitigate the stress level during clinical practicum. **Methodology:** A descriptive cross-sectional study with a quantitative design was carried out at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) using online surveys. This study involved 133 respondents using a simple random sampling method. The inclusion criteria were year 2, year 3 and year 4 nursing students, while the exclusion criteria were year 1 and those who are included in pilot study. The Nursing Stress Scale (NSS) and Brief COPE Inventory were utilized in the data collection. Data was interpreted in descriptive and inferential analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. **Results:** The majority of the respondents perceived assignment and workload as the highest perceived stressors during clinical practicum (mean=10.88, SD= 3.61), while the acceptance and religion were the most frequently coping strategies used among the respondents (mean=6.23, SD=1.29) and (mean=6.22, SD=1.53) respectively. Spearman correlation coefficient test found that there was a significance positive correlation between the perceived stressors and coping strategies used during clinical practicum among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students, $r = .289$, $n = 133$, $p < .001$. **Conclusion:** The finding from this study would enable nursing students in Malaysia to be more aware of better management of their level of stress towards the perceived stressors and ways to cope with stress.

Keywords: Stressors, coping strategies, clinical practicum, nursing students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of stressors and to identify the coping strategies that are frequently used by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum. This chapter is divided into seven sub-sections, which represent the background of the study in section 1.1, followed by problem statements for section 1.2, and section 1.3 contain research questions. In addition, section 1.4 presents the research objectives, while the significance of study was elaborated in section 1.5, then followed by the definition of the study variables in section 1.6, and section 1.7 presents a summary of this chapter.

1.1 Background of Study

Nursing is known as a stressful profession due to the complex job demands and needs. According to the American Psychological Association [APA] Dictionary of Psychology(n.d), stress is any change that creates physical, emotional, or psychological discomfort. It is also the body's response to anything that requires action and attention. The main stressors have been identified as high expectations, excessive responsibility, and limited authority (Babapour et al.,2022). The nursing program aims to produce competent nurses who can use their knowledge as well as skill during practice of their profession. As a result, clinical practice for nursing students should be designed properly by the clinical instructor in order for them to acquire the mental, emotional, and motor skills that are essential for success in the nursing profession. Nursing students have to focus on both clinical and academic performance in order to become professional nurses. Nursing students have been reported to have high levels of stress when compared to students in other courses (Ab Latif & Mat Nor, 2019).

According to Enfermagem (2020), 3.5% of nursing students report high levels of stress, compared to 55.2% which indicates medium levels of stress and 41.3% have low levels of stress. Nursing students who spend approximately half of their study in the clinical area, find that clinical practice to be extremely stressful (Ab Latif & Mat Nor, 2019). This is due to the written assignments given by the lecturer and clinical instructor, case study, daily lifestyle that contribute to stress, insufficient knowledge and skills when performing tasks in the clinical training, and also the relationship between the staff nurses at the ward. Other than that, Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019) stated that stress from patient care, clinical instructor and nursing staff, task and workload are also contributing factors to stress among nursing students.

The consequences of unchecked stress among nursing students may include poor professional image as well as poor performance outcomes during clinical practice. Coping with stress towards perceived stressors is vital to every person. This is because long-term stress prevention and management can reduce the risk from developing other health conditions such as heart disease, obesity, hypertension, and depression (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022). Effective and appropriate coping strategies that are used by the nursing student are very essential aspects as it can help to relieve and reduce the stress levels that are perceived by the stressors. Therefore, coping strategies will help an individual adapt to challenging and new circumstances, which is important for stabilization. Coping mechanisms that students use to alleviate their stress towards perceived stressors can alter and influence their level of stress. Thus, this study will determine the type of stressors and coping strategies used among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Many research revealed that nursing students tend to have greater levels of stress compared to students in other courses (Ab Latif & Mat Nor, 2019). University students face numerous stressors such as a large number of written assignments and tasks, a demanding academic schedule, and exposure to the new environment. On the other hand, nursing students perceived stressors from a heavy curriculum (Suen et al., 2016) due to nursing students have to focus on both academic and clinical practicum during their studies. For instance, a patient's care, death and dying situation, academics-related stressors, and relationship towards the nursing staff and clinical instructor. Based on an unpublished study in UNIMAS, most of the participants had a moderate level of stress which is 80.6%, whereas 11.9% had a high level of stress and only 7.5% of the participants had a low level of stress (Naijim, 2022). In short, nursing students tend to have moderate to high levels of stress during clinical practicum from this previous study conducted in UNIMAS. Hence, this study will further investigate the stressors that the UNIMAS nursing students perceived during clinical practicum.

Undergraduate nursing students commonly encounter numerous stressors during their education and practice as nurses, which could affect their performance (Manandhar & Pramanik, 2019). Ultius (2021) stated that people who are under a lot of pressure or stressed over an extended period of time may feel overwhelmed by their lives and their constant demands, which results in a lack of motivation and passion for carrying out tasks that are related to specific duties and jobs. During clinical practice, clinical instructors' support and assistance for their student's development throughout the nursing journey and stress management skills may reduce the negative impact on them. The amount of stress and perceived stressors an individual experiences and how close the students are to burnout depend on how the students cope and respond to stress. Therefore, during clinical practicum,

understanding the nursing students' coping style that develops from stressors are very crucial to get a healthy lifestyle.

In developing countries, there are several studies reporting sources of stress and coping mechanisms used among nursing students during clinical practicum. However, in Malaysia, there is a lack of research regarding stressors and coping strategies during clinical practicum among nursing students, specifically in Sarawak. There is a very limited understanding on perceived stressors and coping strategies used during clinical practicum and none of the studies in UNIMAS conducted about the perceived stressors. Only the perceived stress level is conducted to assess the level of stress among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students. This knowledge gap justifies the need for this study to determine the type of stressors and coping strategies used among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum.

1.3 Research Question

The research question of this study are:

1. What are the primary stressors perceived by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum?
2. What are the coping strategies that frequently used by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students to alleviate stress during clinical practicum?
3. What is the relationship between stressors and coping strategies among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives for this study are:

1. To identify the primary stressors encountered by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum.
2. To determine the coping strategies frequently used by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students to alleviate stress during clinical practicum.
3. To investigate the relationship between stressors and coping strategies used among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings from this study hold significance importance as the findings shed light on the primary stressors perceived by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum and how these students cope with the situations through the implementation of coping strategies. Assessing the stressors and coping techniques during clinical training can provide valuable baseline information on the stress level experienced by UNIMAS nursing students. Consequently, the findings of this study will provide evidence and information regarding the stressors and coping strategies encountered by nursing students during clinical practice. The results of this study will contribute to the development of better stress management and coping skills among nursing students in Malaysia, specifically when dealing with the perceived stressors. Furthermore, empirical evidence obtained from this study will assist clinical instructors in gaining a deeper understanding of the stressors perceived by UNIMAS nursing students during clinical practicum. Thus, the findings from this study can be utilized by the nursing department to implement stress management and coping strategies aimed to alleviating the perceived stressors encountered by nursing students during clinical practicum in the future.

1.6 Definitions of the Terms

The following terms are defined for better understanding of this study:

1.6.1 Stressors

Conceptual definition: Stressors is any situation or condition that causes physical and emotional stress either from internal or external forces (American Psychological Association [APA] Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Operational definition: In this study, the type of stressors perceived by UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum are measured using The Nursing Stress Scale that was adapted from Muhammad Robot, et al. (2010). The questionnaire identified the seven stress factors during clinical practice that were encountered by the nursing students. The total score, which ranged from 0 to 102, represented the overall frequency of stress experienced by a nursing student, and scoring was done for each subscale by adding up the individual item responses to determine the most stressful factor experienced by the nursing students (Muhammad Robot, et al., 2010). Therefore, higher scores on each subscale indicate the frequent presence of a specific source of stress (Muhammad Robot, et al., 2010).

1.6.2 Coping strategies

Conceptual definition: Coping strategies are an action, behaviors and cognitive skills that are used when dealing with a stressful or unpleasant situation (APA, n.d.).

Operational definition: This study defined coping strategies as UNIMAS undergraduate nursing student's psychological, action, or behavior use towards perceived stressors during clinical practicum. The Brief COPE Inventory that was adopted by Masilamani et al. (2019) will be used to identify the coping method used among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum. The questionnaire identified 14 domains for the coping

mechanisms used during clinical practicum. The Brief COPE Inventory scale has no overall score, but each of the subscale has a maximum which is 8 and minimum which is 2 values indicating how often the participants employ the specific strategy (Abilitylab,2020). A higher score on a subscale implies that the coping methods are used more frequently and greater effectiveness (Ab Latif & Mat Nor, 2019).

1.6.3 Clinical practicum

Conceptual definition: Clinical practicum is academic course for graduate-level programs that involves the student in supervised clinical practice, including direct client contact, and gives students chances to apply what they have learned in the theory class to real-world practice scenarios (Law Insider, n.d.).

Operational definition: In this study, academic courses for UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students who involved in supervised clinical practice, including direct patient care and give chances to them to apply what they have learn in theory class into real life experience in the hospital settings.

1.6.4 Undergraduate nursing student

Conceptual definition: Nursing is a key component of the healthcare system that promotes health, prevention of illness, care of the sick, dying and disabled people of all ages in the health care settings (World Health Organization, 2020). A nursing student is an individual who is enrolled and registered in a nursing educational program (Law Insider, n.d.).

Operational definition: In this study, undergraduate nursing students that include year 2, year 3 and year 4, who are enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing with Honours program under Faculty of Medicine and Science Health at UNIMAS.

1.7 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the study, discussing the background and how clinical stress had affected the lives of nursing students. This study specifically focuses on the perceived stressors and coping mechanisms of UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students during clinical practicum. The problem statement addresses the identified stressors and coping strategies utilized by nursing students during clinical practicum. This study was guided by three research questions and objectives. Additionally, the significance for conducting this research and the definition of key terms related to the research topic are described in this chapter. For the next chapter will present about the literature review of the related topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

A review of the literature presented in this chapter to establish a general idea of the research topic. It will give an overview towards the stressors and coping strategies during clinical practicum. Section 2.1 presented about stressors during clinical practicum, while the coping strategies used during clinical practicum is discussed in Section 2.2, followed by the relationship between stressors and coping strategies in Section 2.3, and finally Section 2.4 present the summary of the chapter. The research articles used for this literature review are obtained from Google Scholar, Research Gate, PubMed and ScienceDirect.

2.1 Stressors during clinical practicum

Stress during clinical practice is very common among healthcare providers, especially nurses (Starc,2018). Nursing students also experience the same stressors that the staff nurses encounter during clinical attachment. This due to nursing students requiring both theoretical knowledge and practical skills during clinical nursing practice to ensure the patient's health care. Many studies revealed the stressors perceived by the nursing students and nursing staff during clinical practices. For instance, a study conducted by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019) stated that stress from clinical assignments and workload (mean= 3.19, SD= 1.18) was the most common stressors that nursing students encounter during clinical practicum. Nursing students have to write a care plan during clinical practice and find clinical assignments very stressful. However, the stress from lack of professional knowledge and skills (mean=2.48, SD= 1.04) was the least types of stressors perceived by the nursing students.

A similar finding was noted for study about stress, stressors and coping strategies among university students conducted by Masilamani et al. (2019). The clinical stressors were the highest ranking for the types of stressors experienced among nursing students (Masilamani et al., 2019). Nursing students state this as a stressful event due to the fact that the student has to learn in handling both life and death situations (Masilamani et al., 2019). However, the least common stressors for this study's finding were differ from a study by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019), in which the financial stressors were the least type of stressors encountered by them.

In a study by Alsaqri (2017) found that assignment and workload were the popular types of stress during clinical training experience by the nursing students (mean= 2.89, SD= 0.85) which shows similar finding with study by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019) and Masilamni et al. (2019). While taking care of patients in the hospital, nursing students also have to do clinical assignments such as nursing care plan, case study write up, and clinical log that lead them into excessive assignments and workload. Other than that, nursing students find it is more stressful when the clinical instructor has to evaluate their performances during clinical areas resulting in them becoming more nervous while doing the nursing routine (Alsaqri,2017).

Similar findings also noted with other studies which are conducted in Ireland by Suresh et al. (2012) that emphasizes the workload as the highest ranking for stressors perceived by the newly qualified nurses. This situation explained the newly qualified nurses have a new responsibility with the new role achievement which is staff nurses. According to Suresh et al. (2012), this stressor scored highest due to the lack of staffing and carrying out the non-nursing duties that will lead to excessive workload which is identified as the contributing source of stress.

Another study is conducted by Manandhar and Pramanik (2019) at a Medical College in Kathmandu among the undergraduate medical, dental and nursing students. Nursing students scored a higher percentage level of stress (75.00%) than dental and medical students, 68.62%

and 63.15% respectively. Manandhar and Pramanik (2019) found that academic related stressors were the main stressors perceived by the students. The students have to study with a huge syllabus and have to take an examination within a limited timeframe. This finding is inconsistent with the study by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019), Masilamani et al. (2019) Alsaqri (2017), and Suresh et al. (2012) which stated clinical assignment and workload were the greatest perceived stressors.

A similar study done by Meghali (2014) also found that the major stressors perceived by the nursing student were academic factors (40%) among the four contributing stress factors in this study. Nursing students perceive stressors when encountered with study, examination, excessive academic assignments and at the same time have to focus on clinical practice.

Looking into another study done by Liu et al. (2022) found a different major stressor experience by nursing students which stated the knowledge and skills as most common stressors. The authors explained that this situation is mainly caused by the students requiring both theoretical and skill when it comes to patient's care during clinical practice. When it comes to emergencies patients, nursing students find it is more difficult to handle as the student did not prepare well to deal with the situations. Nevertheless, this finding was different from a study by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019) which stated lack of professional knowledge and skills was the least common stressors.

In short, nursing students and nursing staff find the clinical assignments and workload was the greatest stressors factor during clinical practicum. As for nursing students have to focus on both academic and clinical practice in order for them to become professional nurses in the future. The nursing students also perceived stressors from the academic related factor which requires them to study for the examinations and have a basic theory when dealing with patients in the clinical area.

2.2 Coping strategies during clinical practicum

Coping strategies used during clinical practicum is very important and plays a pivotal role in adjusting unusual demands or stressors that are perceived by the nursing students. Effective coping strategies assist students in significantly improving their academic and clinical performance while also relieving stress during clinical practicum. However, lack in coping skills leads to maladaptive coping style which is unhealthy and will impede the nursing students' learning and performance during clinical practicum.

There are many studies that have been conducted to study about the coping strategies that are used to alleviate the nursing students' stress during clinical practicum. For an instance, a study conducted by Masilamani et al. (2019) reported that religion (87.5%), acceptance (82.3%), and planning (76%) are top 3 coping strategies utilized by nursing students from a government University in Malaysia. A similar study conducted among nursing students in Kubang Kerian Nursing College Kelantan by Ab Latif and Mat Nor (2019) also reported that religion was the most frequently used coping technique to relieve the students stress during clinical practice (mean=3.30, SD=0.71) and the third coping strategy was planning (mean=2.98, SD= 1.76) while the second coping strategy was instrumental support (mean= 3.09, SD= 1.79) which differ from the study by Masilamani et al. (2019).

The findings are different from studies that were conducted in other countries. From a study conducted in North Jordan among Baccalaureate nursing students by Khater et al. (2014) reported that problem solving method (mean= 2.11, SD= 0.99) was the most frequent coping mechanism utilized by nursing students which differs from study that has been done in Malaysia. According to Masilamani et al. (2019) this situation explained Malaysia being a religious country and most of the findings are correlated between the religiosity that reported the religion as the frequent coping skills method utilized among the nursing students. The study

also shows that avoidance (mean= 1.4, SD= 0.76) was the unfavorable coping skills method to relieve their stress during clinical attachment.

A similar study also done at five universities situated in Jordan about the perceived stress and coping strategies among Jordanian nursing students during clinical practice in psychiatric/mental health courses by Al Zayyat and Al Gamal (2013). This study is done for pre and post training at mental health hospitals. Findings from this research were similar to a study done by Khater et al. (2014), which problem-solving coping method was the most frequently used for both pre (mean= 17.23, SD= 4.27) and post training (mean= 17.60, SD= 4.13) at mental health hospitals. The more nursing students are exposed to the clinical area, the more the student will utilize the problem-solving method as their coping strategy because the student had previous various clinical opportunities. However, this study differs from the study by Khater et al. (2014) which found the transference coping method for both pre (mean= 7.31, SD= 2.51) and post training (mean=6.18, SD= 2.56) were unfavorable coping strategies.

Looking into another study from Alsaqri (2017) that conducted in Saudi Arabia at University of Hail also reported similarly with study done by Khater et al. (2014), problem solving as the most common coping method and avoidance as the unfavorable strategy used by nursing students. Nursing students who had previous clinical learning experience were able to develop problem-solving abilities towards the perceived stressors associated with various clinical training situations (Alsaqri, 2017). The results indicate nursing students tend to choose a positive coping style which is a problem-solving method as the student expose more towards clinical training.

In summary, religion and problem-solving methods were frequently used among nursing students to alleviate their stress level during clinical attachment.