



**STRESS DURING CLINICAL PRACTICUM IN MEDICAL-SURGICAL WARD  
AMONG UNIMAS NURSING STUDENTS**

**LYDIA AWANG @ JUSTOP  
(14398)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the stress intensity among UNIMAS nursing students during their clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward. A total of 86 respondents were selected into the study based on purposive sampling. Data was collected through a newly-created questionnaire which is self-fulfilled by the respondents. Descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney test, Kruskal-Wallis test and Spearman correlation test were used for analysis of the data.

The results showed that clinical practicum in Medical Surgical ward was described as being “moderately” stressful. Although there was no significant difference, the descriptive data showed that Year 4 nursing students reported a high level of stress. Female nursing students significantly experienced high level of stress during practicum in Medical-Surgical ward than male nursing students. Besides, the personal-related stressor was rated as the highest stressful stressor and patient-related stressor was rated as the less stressful stressor.

There were a lot of stressors encountered by nursing students in clinical area. As a result, it reduces the quality of education in the clinical setting. Hence, an effective and supportive stress intervention program should be plan and develop in helping the students to cope with the stressful situations in the clinical area.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Study Background**

Clinical practicum is the essential component of nursing education (Sharif and Masoumi, 2005). It is a course in which students are placed and trained in government hospital or any healthcare setting under the supervision of staff or clinical teacher. Lofmark, Carlsson and Wikblad (2001) suggested that during the clinical practicum, students will have the opportunity to incorporate the previously acquired knowledge or theories.

Clinical practicum will also provide the student with a direct, real experience of nursing profession as they participate in routine nursing activities of the ward and working together with the staffs (Chapman and Orb, 2000). Besides, clinical practicum also provides the students a chance to involve actively or directly in patients care (Shin, 2000). More importantly, clinical practicum provides the opportunity for students to strengthen their clinical skills. It was suggested that the clinical experiences acquired during practicum will gradually develop the level of competency of a nursing student (Reilley and Orb 1992 as cited from Chapman and Orb, 2000).

## **Problem Statement**

Clinical practicum is designed to provide a positive exposure to the students however it was often heard that students experienced problems and difficulties during their clinical practicum (McClelland and Williams, 2002). According to Walton (2002), students identified the clinical practicum as the most stressful component of nursing education. Students have to adapt with the unfamiliar ward surrounding and routine, which are complicated by the unfriendly staff, demanding patients, and also the complexity of equipments (Elliot, 2002). Moreover, students have to perform procedures that can endanger the patients, which further augment their clinical stress (Seyedfatemi, Tafreshi and Hagani, 2007).

“Clinical setting is the most influential context when it comes to acquiring nursing skills and knowledge” (Lee and French, 1997, p.456). However, the presence of variety clinical stressors often disrupted the learning process of students Oermann and Standfest (1997). Besides, an increases stress may interfere with the students’ ability to perform tasks actively and autonomously in the clinical setting (Lindop, 1993 as cited from Admi, 1997). Consequently, clinical education loses its effectiveness in equipped the students with the necessary knowledge and skill.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the stress intensity of UNIMAS nursing student within the clinical area, specifically in Medical-Surgical ward because it is unknown whether UNIMAS nursing students rated their clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward as being stressful or not. Moreover, this study aims to examine the types and severity of the stressors encountered by UNIMAS nursing students which influenced their stress throughout the clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the stress level of students during practicum in Medical-Surgical ward. In the meantime, this study aims to determine the stress level of the associated stressor.

## **Operational Definition**

Clinical practicum: Clinical attachment of nursing students at both Medical and Surgical ward for a relevant clinical nursing course (e.g. Concept and Practice of Basic Nursing clinical practicum or Medical-Surgical Nursing clinical practicum).

Medical-Surgical ward: Referring to the Female & Male Medical ward at Sarawak General Hospital, Female & Male Surgical ward at Sarawak General Hospital, Female & Male ward at Serian Hospital, Female & Male ward at Bau Hospital, Female & Male Medical ward at Bintulu Hospital and Female & Male Surgical ward at Bintulu Hospital.

Nursing students: The UNIMAS pre-registration nursing students who consisted of Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 nursing students during the 2008/2009 academic session.

Stressors: The sources of stress evaluated in this study which identified from the reviewed literature and also from informal interview with several UNIMAS nursing students. It can be categorized into 6: (1) Clinical teacher-related stressor, (2) Nursing staff-related stressors, (3) Nursing colleague-related stressors, (4) Patient-related stressors, (5) Personal-related stressors, (6) Ward environment-related stressors

Mean stress score: It indicated the student's stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward. It is calculated by summed the scores from all the 27 stressor items and then divided by 27.

Overall mean stress score: It indicated the stress intensity for clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward which based on the mean stress scores of the overall 86 respondents. It is categorized into:

*Very little stress: Overall mean stress score ranged from 0 until 1.49*

*Little stress: Overall mean stress score ranged from 1.5 until 2.49*

*Moderate stress: Overall mean stress score ranged from 2.5 until 3.49*

*Much stress: Overall mean stress score ranged from 3.5 until 4.49*

*A great deal stress: Overall mean stress score ranged from 4.5 until 5*

Mean stressor score of each category of stressor: It indicated the stress intensity for each category of stressor. It is determined by added the scores of the stressor items categorized under the respective category of stressor and then divided by the number of stressor items. For example, there were 5 stressor items categorized under “Nursing staff-related stressor”. Therefore, the mean stressor score of “Nursing staff-related stressor” is determined by divided the added scores from all the 5 stressor items with 5.

## **Conceptual Definition**

Stress: According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “stress is defined as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lewis, Heitkemper and Dirksen, 2004, p. 112)

Stressor: “Stress-inducing demands which can be physical or emotional and pleasant or unpleasant, as long as they require the individual to adapt” (Lewis, Heitkemper and Dirksen, 2004, p. 112).

## **Research Objectives**

1. To determine nursing students’ demographic data.
2. To determine the stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward.
3. To evaluate the stress intensity for Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 nursing students and also for female and male nursing students during practicum in Medical-Surgical ward
4. To measure the stress intensity for each category of stressor.
5. To examine the stress intensity of each category of stressor for Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 nursing students and also female and male nursing students.
6. To examine the significant differences in stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward and also stress intensity for each category of stressor between Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 nursing students and also between female and male nursing students.

## **Research Questions**

1. What is the nursing students' demographic data?
2. What is the stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward?
3. What is the stress intensity for Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 nursing students and also for female and male nursing students during practicum in Medical-Surgical ward?
4. What is the stress intensity for each category of stressor?
5. What is the stress intensity of each category of stressor for Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 nursing students and also for female and male nursing students?
7. Is there a significant difference in stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward and also stress intensity for each category of stressor between Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 nursing students and also between female and male nursing students?

### **Significance of the study**

In UNIMAS nursing program, clinical practicum begins during the second semester and continues concurrently with theoretical course until the end of Year 4. The UNIMAS pre-registration nursing programme requires the students to complete 33 credit hours of clinical nursing courses throughout the four years of (8 semesters) full-time study (Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, 2005). Based on the curriculum plan, 58 percent of (19 credit hours) clinical nursing courses require the students to undergo clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward (Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, 2005).

Given that the quantity of time spent in the Medical-Surgical ward by UNIMAS nursing students was more compared to the other clinical setting, therefore, the Medical-Surgical ward become the most influential context in equipped the UNIMAS nursing students with the essential nursing knowledge and skills. Thus, the study regarding the UNIMAS nursing students' stress in the Medical-Surgical ward is imperative as it could determine the underlying stressors affecting the students during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward. From the information, interventions could be develop to further increases the quality of clinical practicum of UNIMAS nursing students in Medical-Surgical ward.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

A review of the literature was conducted to determine the stressful situations encountered by nursing students in clinical area using the following databases: Proquest and Academic Source Premier.

### **Sources of stress of nursing students in clinical area**

In 2000, Chapman and Orb conducted a study to understand the lived clinical experience of nursing students. The study was conducted among 13 Year 3 nursing students in a Western Australian School of Nursing by applying Husserlian descriptive phenomenological method. The students in the study described the clinical practicum as the essential part of nursing education. There were many factors that augmented students' learning activity in clinical area. On the other hands, there were also factors that stressed the student during clinical practice. From the study, it was reported that negative attitude of the nursing staff was the key factor of stress among the students. The nursing staff demeaned university nursing students as being incompetent and useless because they perceived nursing students in tertiary programs have lack of clinical experience and knowledge. This study also revealed that students often experienced theory-practice gap in the clinical area which hindered the students' clinical learning process.

In Iran, a similar study was conducted by Shariff and Masoumi (2005) among 60 nursing students (30 Year 2, 30 Year 3, and 30 Year 4) at Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. This study aimed to investigate students' view about their clinical practice by utilizing focus group of qualitative research. Based on the research findings, nursing students were dissatisfied with their clinical practicum. The study further revealed that students' dissatisfaction was resulted from theory-practice gap, lack of supervision in the clinical area, and role conflict. For theory-practice gap, students felt difficult to incorporate the learned knowledge into practice. Whereas, in role conflict issue, the students expressed that their work was "not professional nursing" as they often doing simple basic nursing care throughout their clinical practicum. On the other hands, students found nursing staff provided less supervision to the students as they were busy with their duties. Some of the nursing staff interested to supervise the students however they were unaware of the learning objectives of the students. Clinical supervision provided by the clinical teacher also lack as expressed by the students. In the study, it revealed that clinical teacher more focused on evaluative role than a teaching role. The study also revealed that majority of students felt anxious at the beginning of their clinical practicum. Due to lack of knowledge at the beginning of their clinical practicum, the students were worried of giving wrong information to the patient, have fear of harming the patients and also the fear of performing nursing procedure incorrectly. However, their stress reduced as they progressed through their nursing studies.

Another study was conducted by Shipton (2002) among 16 nursing students at either at a private college or a state university in western Pennsylvania. The study utilized a grounded theory methodological approach and aimed to determine the stressful clinical situations encountered by the students, and further explore the stages undergo by students in dealing with the stressful clinical situations and the emotions generated in each stage. Based on the findings, there were six important categories of stressors identified: (1) Actions of clinical faculty, (2) Actions of the nursing staff, (3) Actions of peers, (4) Implementing nursing procedures, (5) Preparing for clinical assignments, (6) Encountering new clinical rotations. Students described that the clinical evaluation, incompetent behaviour and moody behaviour of clinical faculty as stressful. In addition, being observed by clinical faculty in performing new procedure also stressed the students. On the other hands, students expressed the negatives attitudes, actions and comments of nursing staff caused a lot of stress to them in clinical area. In addition, the students stated that some of the nursing staff always took advantage of the students to finish works in the ward. Apart from that, students also experienced stress with their peers, particularly when dealing with competition among colleagues. On the other hands, students often expressed feeling of incompetent in implementing new procedures as they perceived themselves lack of hands-on experience and inadequate practice in implementing technical skill such as giving injection.

In addition, a study was conducted by Oerman (1998) for the purpose to compare the degree of stress, challenge, and threat in clinical practice between Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) and Baccalaureate Sciences Nursing (BSN). The descriptive exploratory study utilized a modified Pagana Clinical Stress Questionnaire (CSQ) for collection of quantitative data. Open-ended questions were included for collection of qualitative data. A convenience sample of 415 nursing students from ten randomly selected ADN and BSN programs in the Midwest involved in the

study. The qualitative data revealed that clinical teacher, clinical environment, paper work, demand associated with patient care, lack of knowledge of patient care, and fear of error were the factors caused their clinical practice as being stressful. Whereas, acquiring new knowledge and skills, caring for diverse patients, managing demands and responsibilities of patient care and relating theory to practice were identified as the challenging factors during the clinical practice. On the other hands, fear of harming the patients, failing clinically, fear of contracting disease, and lack of confidence to make clinical decision were the example of threatening features during clinical practice.

In Korea, Shin (2000) conducted a study to examine the experience of nursing students during their clinical practicum by using a phenomenological approach of qualitative study. The study involved 25 nursing students who were in the first semester of the junior level (or Year 3) in a baccalaureate nursing program at a large women's university in Seoul. There were three themes identified: 1) Period of illusion, 2) Period of confusion, 3) Period of challenge. The study suggested that most difficulty encountered during the period of confusion. During the period, students experienced theory-practice gap and also reality shock, particularly dealing with death and life reality. The study also revealed that students have encountered both "bad nurse" and "good nurse" during clinical practicum. The "bad nurse" who reluctant to allow students to perform procedures, and also who unwilling to share their expertise with students were described as terrible which eventually caused students to feel discontented about their clinical practice. Instead of that, the students also expressed they have lack of supervision by nursing staff. As a consequence, they felt "loss" especially when they have to confront with various unpredictable situations in the ward. In addition, students also experienced being disgraced by patient or

relative. One of the students expressed that because of “student status”, they often received poor respect from the patients or relative. Furthermore, when students made a simple mistake, patients or relative were grumbled about it because they realized students incapable to be against them. The study also revealed that some of the patients refused the students to perform even a simple procedure to them.

Besides, Hoel, Giga and Davidson (2007) had conducted a study among 48 nursing students in England to examine the student nurses’ experience of negative behaviour and bullying during clinical practicum. The study utilized a focus group of qualitative research design. The participants were recruited from two universities in the northwest of England. Apart from that, participants also recruited by means of advertisement in UK nurses’ magazine and newspaper. The study revealed that due to staff shortage, students expressed that they often being used as extra staff to carry out simple, repetitive tasks which hindered their learning process. In some cases, students were given a responsibility beyond their experiences which difficult to deal with. The study also discovered that the students often stressed with an increased workload in the ward. In addition, the study found out that students were made feel unwelcome and ignored by the staff. Besides, the guidance provided by the staff also less. Thus, fear of make mistakes and also fear of litigation were often expressed by the students in response to diminished staff supervision during clinical practicum. Apart from that, the students also had experienced abusive behaviour. The students stated they were belittled and humiliated by staff.

In addition, Mahat (1996) has conducted a study to determine the stressful events of the 104 first year Nepalese nursing student in clinical setting and also the coping technique used by the students in dealing with the stressful events. The stressful events which identified using a Critical Incident Tools are divided into 4 categories: (1) Interpersonal relationship, (2) Initial experiences, (3) Feeling helpless, (4) Demeaning experience. Poor relationship with teachers is frequently reported by the students. Regarding the demeaning experience, it was reported that students often received an inferior treatment by others because of their “student status”.

In 1998, Mahat continued a study to identify incidents in clinical area that were perceived as stressful by utilizing a Critical Incident Tools. This study involved 107 nursing students from a college in northeastern United States. The study reported similar stressful events from the previous study except for demeaning experiences. The additional stressful events were found which comprised of heavy workload and ability to perform roles.

Moving to another perspective, Admi (1997) utilized Nursing Students’ Stress Scale (NSSS) to determine students’ stress level and also the severity of the stressor at the beginning, during and also at the end of clinical practicum. Lazarus & Folkman (1989) suggested that the level of stress of the respective stressor is determined by the person’s subjective perception (as cited from Admi, 1997). Thus, as revealed in this study, there was a difference in stress intensity of the various stressors among the students. This exploratory longitudinal study was conducted among 46 nursing students at nursing school in Israel. This study identified different means stress level among the six category of stressors which comprised of: (1) Inadequate knowledge and training,

(2) Averse & embarrassing sights, (3) Instructor's close supervision, (4) Insufficient hospital resources, (5) Causing pain and suffering, (6) Educational reality conflict.

## **Summary**

From the reviewed literature, it was identified that there were limited information regarding stress during clinical practicum among nursing students in Malaysia, especially among UNIMAS nursing students. Besides, the information regarding stress among nursing students in Medical-Surgical ward also limited. Therefore, this study will attempt to determine the stress intensity among UNIMAS nursing students during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward.

It is also apparent from the literatures that nursing students encountered many problems and difficulties in a clinical area which could be the potential clinical stressors to nursing students. From the literatures, it was revealed that the sources of stress among nursing students were found to be similar, regardless of place and time. However, the stress intensity may vary between individuals (Lazarus and Folkman, 1989 as cited from Admi, 1997). Therefore, this study will also evaluate the stress intensity of the associated clinical stressors in Medical-Surgical ward among UNIMAS nursing students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the processes undertaken during the research and will address the research design, sampling and sample, research tool, validity and reliability of the research tool, ethical considerations, data collection procedure and finally data analysis.

### **Research design**

This study used a quantitative, descriptive research approach for collection and analysis of data. This research design was used as it could measure the stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward and also the stress intensity of each category of stressor among UNIMAS nursing students. Descriptive study is often used to examine the relationship between variables (Hopkins, 2008). Thus, descriptive study was used in this study as it could determine the relationship between stress intensity during clinical practicum in Medical-Surgical ward with year of study and sex. Burns & Grove (1993) suggested that the findings from the descriptive research may serve as a basis for further quantitative research such as correlational, quasi-experimental or experimental studies.

## **Sample**

The sample was the UNIMAS pre-registration nursing students who studying in Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University Malaysia Sarawak. During this study, there were 116 UNIMAS pre-registration nursing students which encompassed of 24 Year 1, 31 Year 2, 27 Year 3, and 34 Year 4 nursing students. After the criteria for the selection into study was identified, Year 1 nursing students were excluded from this study. Hence, this study involved 92 UNIMAS nursing students which comprised of 31 Year 2 nursing students, 27 Year 3 nursing students and 34 Year 4 nursing students during academic year 2008/2009.

## **Sampling Method**

The sampling used in this study was purposive sampling. The respondents were purposefully selected into this study based on a particular characteristic (Burns & Grove, 1993). The respondents should at least have undergone 3 credit hours of clinical nursing course in a Medical-Surgical ward prior to the study. Table 1 evidenced the clinical nursing courses which underwent by the students prior to the study. Therefore, the sample comprised Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 UNIMAS pre-registration nursing students who had been attached in Medical-Surgical ward for the relevant clinical practicum courses as shown in Table 1. The Year 1 nursing students are excluded from this study because they are not undergone any clinical practicum yet.