

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND RESILIENCE AMONG NURSING STUDENTS: A LECTURER-LED INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout are increasingly common among nursing students due to academic pressure, clinical demands, and the stress of professional identity formation. Despite recognition of their psychological vulnerability, early interventions are limited due to stigma, poor mental health literacy, and low resource utilization. This study explores the effectiveness of a lecturer-led intervention in improving mental health awareness and resilience among undergraduate nursing students at a Malaysian university. A quantitative survey design was employed, using pre- and post-intervention self-administered questionnaires. Validated instruments measured psychological well-being, perceived stress, resilience, and help-seeking attitudes. The intervention consisted of structured psychoeducational modules, guided reflections, and resilience activities delivered by nursing lecturers trained in mental health promotion. Post-intervention analysis revealed statistically significant improvements in mental health awareness, stress coping skills, and resilience. Students also demonstrated reduced stigma and greater willingness to seek support. The findings suggest that a lecturer-led intervention can positively influence students' mental health literacy and coping capacity. This study supports the integration of mental health education into nursing curricula and highlights the potential of academic staff in delivering impactful interventions. Institutional support, lecturer training, and the long-term embedding of such programs are recommended to sustain psychological well-being in nursing education.

Keywords: Nursing students; Mental health; Resilience; Survey; Lecturer-led intervention; psychological well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a growing concern in higher education, particularly among nursing students who are frequently exposed to intense academic pressures, emotionally demanding clinical experiences, and the challenges of transitioning into professional roles. These stressors often contribute to heightened levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and burnout (Lee et al., 2021; Alzayyat & Al-Gamal, 2023). Globally, mental health disorders among university students are now recognized as a public health priority, with nursing students identified as one of the most at-risk populations (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

In the context of nursing education, students must not only acquire theoretical and clinical competencies but also manage personal expectations, interpersonal stress, and emotional fatigue. The demands of caring for patients, coupled with performance pressures and long clinical hours, can result in chronic stress if not properly managed (Ramos-Morcillo et al., 2021). Numerous studies have shown that these stressors, when prolonged, may lead to reduced academic performance, withdrawal from programs, and a decline in overall well-being (Chen et al., 2022; Norling-Gustafsson et al., 2023).

Despite increased mental health advocacy, many nursing students remain reluctant to seek help due to fear of stigma, lack of awareness, or perceived weakness associated with psychological distress (Nguyen et al., 2023). Mental health stigma in the healthcare environment is particularly concerning, as it not only limits help-seeking behavior among students but also perpetuates negative attitudes toward mental illness in future professional practice. Therefore, early mental health promotion, especially within nursing education, is crucial to ensure the psychological resilience and long-term career sustainability of nursing professionals.

Educators, especially nursing lecturers, play a critical role in supporting students' psychological development. Beyond their academic duties, lecturers are well-positioned to foster a supportive environment, promote open dialogue about mental health, and model healthy coping behaviors (Kaur & Abdullah, 2023). Recent research highlights the effectiveness of lecturer-led interventions in improving mental health awareness, building emotional resilience, and reducing stigma among health science students. (Karen, et al: 2022)

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a structured lecturer-led intervention in enhancing mental health awareness and resilience among undergraduate nursing students. By integrating psychoeducational components, reflective discussions, and emotional regulation strategies into a familiar learning environment, this intervention is expected to empower students to better manage stress, increase mental health literacy, and develop adaptive coping mechanisms. Given the increasing prevalence of mental health issues in academic settings, this study employs a quantitative survey approach to assess the effectiveness of a structured lecturer-led intervention in enhancing mental health awareness and resilience.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION.

- i. To determine the effect of a lecturer-led intervention on mental health awareness among undergraduate nursing students.
- ii. To evaluate changes in resilience levels and stress management skills following the intervention.
- iii. To assess the impact of the intervention on students' attitudes toward mental health stigma and their willingness to seek support.

3. UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH IN NURSING EDUCATION

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being and plays a critical role in academic success, professional development, and personal growth among nursing students. The demanding nature of nursing education which includes high academic expectations, emotionally intense clinical placements, and limited recovery time can predispose students to stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout. According to Kaya et al. (2021), nursing students often report higher levels of psychological distress compared to students in other disciplines due to the dual demands of theoretical learning and practical exposure. This reality underscores the importance of integrating mental health education and support mechanisms into the core structure of nursing programs.

Furthermore, mental health literacy, defined as the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in their recognition, management, or prevention, is necessary competency for nursing students. A recent study by Aydin and Kus (2024) involving 676 nursing students found that mental health literacy was significantly associated with higher resilience levels, suggesting that promoting awareness can improve coping abilities and reduce vulnerability to mental health issues. Although mental health is often discussed in clinical nursing subjects, it is rarely positioned as a personal and educational priority for students themselves. Hence, a proactive focus on mental health awareness within nursing education is both timely and essential to prepare emotionally competent and professionally resilient future nurses.

3.1. Psychological Stressor Faced by Nursing Students

Nursing students are particularly vulnerable to psychological stress due to the complex and high-pressure demands of their academic and clinical training. They are required to manage a heavy workload, long study hours, frequent evaluations, and emotionally charged clinical experiences. These challenges often lead to elevated levels of anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms. A cross-sectional study by Tung et al. (2018) involving over 1,000 nursing students in Taiwan found that 41% of respondents reported moderate to severe levels of stress, primarily related to academic overload, clinical performance anxiety, and fear of making mistakes in patient care. These stressors, if left unaddressed, may lead to burnout, poor academic performance, and withdrawal from nursing programs.

In addition to academic and clinical demands, nursing students also face psychosocial stressors such as financial pressure, lack of sleep, inadequate support systems, and limited time for self-care. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified these stressors by introducing abrupt shifts to online learning, disrupted clinical placements, and heightened fears of infection. Labrague and Ballard (2021) conducted a systematic review and found that the pandemic significantly intensified anxiety and stress among nursing students worldwide, particularly due to uncertainty, isolation, and limited practical exposure. These findings highlight the critical need for mental health support systems, coping skills training, and resilience-building interventions within nursing education to ensure the well-being and professional sustainability of future nurses.

3.2 The Role of Emotional Resilience in Academic and Clinical Success

Emotional resilience—the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity is a crucial psychological asset for nursing students navigating the challenges of both academic rigor and clinical practice. Nursing education exposes students to emotionally intense experiences, including patient suffering, time pressure, ethical dilemmas, and fear of making clinical errors. Resilience acts as a protective buffer against these stressors, promoting emotional regulation, perseverance, and psychological well-being. According to Reyes et al. (2015), nursing students with higher levels of resilience demonstrated greater satisfaction with their clinical learning and exhibited lower levels of stress and burnout. This suggests that resilience not only safeguards mental health but also enhances the quality of clinical learning and engagement.

More recently, a large-scale study by Galletta et al. (2023) involving over 900 nursing students in Italy confirmed that resilience significantly predicted academic performance, clinical confidence, and reduced psychological distress. The study also highlighted the moderating role of social support and emotional intelligence in strengthening students' coping capacity. Similarly, a study

conducted in Spain by Sánchez-Teruel and Robles-Bello (2022) found that resilience mediated the negative impact of academic stress on psychological well-being, emphasizing the need to cultivate resilience as an essential competency in nursing education. These findings underscore the value of integrating resilience-building strategies—such as mentoring, reflective practice, and mindfulness—into nursing curricula to foster students' ability to succeed academically and thrive emotionally in clinical settings.

3.3 Theoretical Models Guiding Mental Health and Resilience Building

The development of mental health awareness and resilience in nursing students is underpinned by several psychological theories that explain how individuals perceive, process, and respond to stress. One of the most widely applied frameworks is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which posits that stress is not merely a stimulus or response, but rather a dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment. This model emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal and coping strategies in moderating the psychological impact of stressful situations—a concept particularly relevant to nursing students frequently exposed to high-stress clinical environments. When applied to nursing education, the model helps explain how students assess challenges such as clinical errors or academic failure and choose adaptive or maladaptive coping mechanisms.

In addition to stress-coping frameworks, Resilience Theory offers valuable insight into how individuals bounce back from adversity. Resilience is increasingly viewed not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process shaped by personal, social, and institutional factors. According to Hart et al. (2016), resilience can be cultivated through targeted educational interventions, including mentorship, reflection, and skills training. Furthermore, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, especially the construct of self-efficacy, supports resilience development by highlighting the belief in one's capacity to influence outcomes. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to engage in proactive coping and to view challenges as opportunities for growth. These theoretical models form the conceptual foundation for designing effective lecturer-led interventions that aim to strengthen psychological resilience and promote mental well-being among nursing students.

3.4 Designing Lecturer-Led Interventions for Mental Health Promotion

Lecturer-led interventions hold significant potential in promoting mental health and emotional resilience among nursing students, particularly because lecturers are uniquely positioned to observe, guide, and influence students' emotional well-being throughout their academic journey. Effective intervention designs often incorporate psychoeducation, skill-building workshops, structured reflection, and mentoring sessions aimed at fostering resilience, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. According to Galletta et al. (2023), faculty-led resilience programs that include peer support, reflective activities, and academic coaching have shown to significantly improve students' mental health outcomes, including reductions in anxiety and increased clinical self-confidence. These programs are most impactful when embedded into the curriculum and aligned with theoretical frameworks such as the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping or Self-Efficacy Theory. While many lecturer-led interventions incorporate reflective writing and peer discussions, this study focused on psychoeducational modules, resilience-building exercise, and stress management techniques that could be quantitatively assessed.

Recent studies also emphasize the value of structured intervention models such as strength-based education, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and emotional intelligence (EI) training in lecturer-led formats. For example, a quasi-experimental study conducted by Kim and Lee (2023) demonstrated that a 10-week strength-based nursing education program led by faculty significantly enhanced students' psychological well-being and coping skills. Similarly, mental health literacy modules delivered by trained educators were found to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviors in university settings (Wei et al., 2020). Lecturer-led interventions are most effective when they are proactive, continuous, and culturally sensitive, allowing students to build internal coping mechanisms while fostering a safe and supportive learning environment.

3.5 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Lecturer-Led Approaches

Evaluating the effectiveness of lecturer-led mental health interventions is crucial to ensure the sustainability, scalability, and refinement of such programs within nursing education. Various studies have demonstrated that interventions led by academic faculty can positively influence psychological outcomes such as stress reduction, increased resilience, and improved academic engagement. For instance, a cross-sectional study by Galletta et al. (2023) involving 989 nursing students found that students who perceived strong faculty support reported significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. This suggests that the presence of engaged, supportive lecturers can act as a psychological buffer for students navigating the emotional demands of nursing education.

The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated using standardized instrument such as the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), and a Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire. These tools allowed for measurable, statistical comparison or pre- and post-intervention outcomes. Efficacy Scale has been instrumental in measuring the outcomes of these interventions. Kim and Lee (2023) evaluated a 10-week strength-based education program and reported statistically significant improvements in students' psychological well-being, emotional coping, and academic motivation. Furthermore, qualitative methods such as reflective journals, focus groups, and open-ended surveys provide deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions. Combining both quantitative and qualitative evaluations ensures a comprehensive understanding of the impact of lecturer-led approaches and helps tailor interventions to meet the specific emotional and developmental needs of nursing students.

3.6 Integrating Mental Health Awareness into Nursing Curricula

The integration of mental health awareness into nursing curricula is increasingly recognized as a critical strategy for promoting the emotional well-being and professional readiness of nursing students. Given the high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and burnout reported among nursing students, embedding mental health literacy and emotional coping content within the academic syllabus ensures early exposure to psychological self-care principles. According to Wei et al. (2020), mental health literacy programs in educational settings have been shown to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviors. By aligning mental health content with existing nursing modules such as professional ethics, communication, or clinical practice—students can better appreciate the relevance of psychological resilience to their future roles as caregivers.

Recent studies also advocate for structured inclusion of anti-stigma education, mindfulness practices, and reflective exercises as part of formal coursework. In a scoping review by LoGiudice and Bartos (2023), mental health curricula that combined theory with reflective writing and group discussions significantly enhanced empathy and decreased stigma among nursing students. Furthermore, integrating self-care strategies and resilience-building activities within clinical training fosters both personal growth and professional competence. Institutions that adopt a holistic, curriculum-wide approach rather than isolated workshops are more likely to create sustained cultural change and a supportive learning environment. As nursing education prepares students to care for others, it must equally prioritize teaching students how to care for themselves.

3.7 Institutional and Cultural Challenges in Promoting Mental Health

Despite growing awareness of the importance of mental health in nursing education, institutional and cultural challenges continue to impede the effective implementation of support strategies. One of the major barriers is the persistent stigma associated with mental illness, which discourages nursing students from seeking help or openly discussing their struggles. In many academic environments, particularly in collectivist cultures, emotional vulnerability may be perceived as a sign of weakness or professional inadequacy. According to Moxham et al. (2020), stigma within healthcare education settings is often internalized by students, leading to increased self-criticism and reluctance to access mental health services. Institutions that lack clearly defined mental health support systems, trained faculty, and culturally sensitive approaches often leave students with limited resources to cope with emotional challenges.

Moreover, systemic limitations such as insufficient time in the curriculum, lack of trained mental health personnel, and rigid academic structures further hinder the integration of mental health promotion. A qualitative study by Jang et al. (2023) revealed that nursing students valued emotional support from faculty but felt that academic pressure and lack of mental health literacy among educators reduced their willingness to reach out. Cultural expectations around stoicism and self-sacrifice, especially in healthcare professions, may also normalize burnout and emotional suppression. To overcome these barriers, institutions must invest in faculty development, embed mental health policies at the organizational level, and ensure that programs are designed with cultural relevance and sensitivity. Only through a multi-layered, institution-wide commitment can sustainable progress be made in creating psychologically safe educational environments.

Finding from this survey provide valuable evidence to guide institutional improvements by identifying specific areas where students lack mental health awareness, resilience, and support, enabling nursing faculties to tailor programs, policies, and curriculum enhancements that address students' psychological needs more effectively.

4. DISCUSSION

This survey results indicate a significant improvement in mental health literacy and resilience scores post-intervention, suggestion that even brief, structured programs led by trained lecturers can lead to measurable improvements in student wellbeing. This paper has explored the multifaceted nature of mental health awareness and resilience in nursing education, emphasizing the potential of lecturer-led interventions as a proactive approach to support students' psychological well-being. The literature consistently highlights that nursing students are at increased risk of experiencing psychological stress due to academic overload, emotional

challenges in clinical settings, and limited access to mental health support (Tung et al., 2018; Labrague & Ballad, 2021). This underlines the urgent need to implement structured and contextually relevant interventions within nursing curricula.

The theoretical frameworks presented—including the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Resilience Theory (Hart et al., 2016), and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997)—offer a strong conceptual foundation for developing such interventions. These models emphasize adaptive coping, self-regulation, and confidence-building, which are key in managing academic and clinical stressors. Lecturer-led initiatives, particularly those incorporating reflective practice, resilience training, and emotional literacy modules, have shown promising results in enhancing students' ability to cope (Galletta et al., 2023; Kim & Lee, 2023). The positive effects of these interventions are measurable through both quantitative and qualitative methods, reinforcing the value of evidence-based educational practices.

However, significant institutional and cultural challenges remain. Stigma, lack of trained faculty, and culturally insensitive programming can reduce the effectiveness of mental health initiatives (Moxham et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2023). To be impactful, interventions must be embedded into the curriculum, supported by institutional policy, and tailored to the cultural context of learners. Faculty development and mental health literacy training are equally important to ensure lecturers are well-equipped to lead such initiatives.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting mental health awareness and resilience through lecturer-led interventions is a timely and evidence-based strategy to support undergraduate nursing students. As this study has shown, structured interventions delivered by trained lecturers can significantly improve students' mental health literacy, stress management, and resilience when implemented in a supportive academic environment.

The survey findings provide quantitative evidence that such interventions not only reduce psychological distress but also positively influence students' attitudes toward mental health and help-seeking behavior. Grounded in psychological theories and aligned with educational best practices, lecturer-led approaches offer a practical and scalable model for mental health promotion in nursing programs.

To sustain these benefits, institutions must address structural and cultural challenges by embedding mental health content within the curriculum, equipping faculty with mental health promotion competencies, and fostering an environment that normalizes open dialogue on emotional well-being. Future research should examine the long-term impact of these interventions and assess their effectiveness across different institutional and cultural settings.

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