

STRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS AND THE NEED TO ADDRESS IT

ESTRESSE ENTRE UNIVERSITÁRIAS(OS) DE ENFERMAGEM E A NECESSIDADE DO SEU ENFRENTAMENTO

Fernanda Michelle Santos e Silva Ribeiro¹, Fernanda Carneiro Mussi², Cláudia Geovana da Silva Pires³

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Stress is understood as a response to events that individuals perceive to be threats.¹ As a phenomenon, it varies according to personal perceptions and can be found in quite distinct contexts.²⁻³

Many recent studies have shown that the undergraduate years of nursing are a period of exposure to situations that can lead to changes in stress levels^{4,5} and high stress levels among nursing students.⁶⁻⁷ Stress can produce impacts in the life quality of this population⁸ and affect their academic performance.⁹⁻¹⁰

During their academic paths, undergraduate students may experience different situations that can be perceived as stressful. Highlights among them are extended course loads, activities at clinical settings, interactions with faculty members and classmates, academic backlog and tests, among others.¹¹⁻¹²

In addition to situations specifically linked to the academic setting, some studies show that socio-economic characteristics such as gender, age group, marital status and family income are important factors that affect stress levels among nursing college students.^{6-7,10} Many students need¹¹ to provide for their expenses with housing and study fees, in addition to other personal expenses, and when their monthly income is insufficient, this becomes a key stress factor. A study has evinced that the relation between insufficient income levels and stress can be linked to student limitations in terms of access to relaxation and leisure activities.¹³

A number of researches also found that younger⁶ female faculty members^{6-7, 10} with a companion^{7,10} are more vulnerable to higher stress levels. Particularly upon going into higher education, younger persons must adapt to their new academic setting and learn to conciliate their college duties and personal activities¹⁴, and they may experience more difficulties in terms of managing their time and activities. Since women are culturally more likely to accumulate domestic and family tasks, higher stress levels can befall them in their attempt to manage time and cope with academic and personal demands.¹⁵

The high levels of stress among nursing students

REVISA

¹ Nurse. MSc in Nursing. PhD student at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Bahia, Brazil.
fmss.fernanda@gmail.com

² Nurse. PhD in Nursing, Federal University of Bahia. Bahia, Brazil.

³ Nurse. PhD in Nursing, Federal University of Bahia. Bahia, Brazil.

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described by current studies⁶⁻⁷, and the distinct academic and socioeconomic factors to which they are exposed serve as a warning and show that higher education institutions need to promote activities to minimize stress and help students improve their management of stressful situations. To improve these levels, they may offer physical education activities, relaxation sessions⁵ or auriculotherapy, for instance – which has been shown to be efficacious in terms of decreasing stress levels¹⁶, as well as psycho-pedagogical assistance, in their setting. Increased dialogue among managers, staff members and students on stress factors during the academic training process is also necessary, so these actors may jointly find new feasible measures that contribute to an increasingly healthier academic path and to the adoption of strategies to tackle stress factors, thus minimizing suffering during the undergraduate years.

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