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Research Article

The Mediating Effects of Social Support and a Grateful Disposition on the Relationship between Life Stress and Anger in Korean Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Anger management is a very important issue for nursing education. However, there is a lack of research identifying related factors. This study examined the mediating effects of social support and a grateful disposition on the relationship between life stress and anger in nursing students.

Methods: The participants were 172 nursing students recruited from two universities in cities in South Korea. Baron and Kenny's regression method and the Sobel test were used to analyze the mediating effects of social support and a grateful disposition on the association between life stress and anger.

Results: There were significant correlations between life stress, social support, a grateful disposition, and anger. In addition, social support and a grateful disposition exerted full mediating effects on the relationship between life stress and anger.

Conclusion: Based on this study's results, enhancing social support and grateful disposition could help nursing students who experience anger resulting from life stress to manage their anger effectively. This finding suggests that, as specific strategies for anger management, nursing educators should encourage nursing students to use sources of social support and to engage in various gratitude activities.

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Introduction

During their college years, students encounter various developmental tasks pertaining to their studies, career, interpersonal relationships, and value judgments and undergo continual stress, which often leads to anger [1–3]. Anger is a normal, natural emotion that people experience in everyday life. However, high levels of anger could lead to mental health problems, such as somatization and suicidal ideation, damage interpersonal relationships, and induce antisocial behavior; therefore, college students with high levels of anger could experience difficulties in completing developmental tasks successfully [4–6].

Nursing students faced with demanding and difficult conditions have been shown to experience anger in healthcare environments [7]. Previous studies reported that anger was one of the negative

emotions displayed by nursing students in response to stress [3]. According to a study involving female college students in Korea, levels of anger in nursing students were significantly higher relative to those observed in other college students [8]. Moreover, nursing students' anger requires effective management as it could exert a negative impact on the quality of nursing, which could affect patients, the students, and future healthcare providers [4,6,9]. In this context, it is imperative that nursing educators identify the factors influencing anger in nursing students and consider these factors in the development of intervention programs involving effective anger management.

Anger is an emotional response to stress, and numerous previous studies have shown that social stress increased levels of anger [3,8]. Therefore, stress could be regarded as an important factor that requires consideration in efforts to understand individuals' anger. It is not surprising that nursing students experience high levels of stress. According to the results of a study involving nursing students in Jordan [2], more than half of the participants experienced above-average stress levels. Moreover, nursing students' stress was shown to induce negative emotions including anxiety, dread, anger, and depression [3,10]. Therefore,

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stress is likely to be significantly associated with anger in nursing students. However, further research is required to confirm this speculation as no previous studies have demonstrated a clear correlation between nursing students' perceived life stress and anger.

In addition, identification of mediating factors that alleviate the impact of stress on anger could be an effective strategy for anger management. Most previous studies have placed a strong emphasis on anger as an independent variable or focused on correlations between anger and risk factors such as stress and negative emotion [4–6,9]. Therefore, it is crucial to identify protective factors that reduce anger levels, to ensure effective anger management.

One such protective factor, social support, has been shown to mitigate the negative impact of stress on individuals' physical and psychological health [11,12]. Previous studies have identified practice stress as a predictor of social support in nursing students [13] and a need for social support as a buffer against adolescents' stress in effective anger management [14]. For example, individuals who received strong social support under stressful circumstances have been shown to experience greater psychological well-being and lower levels of anger relative to those who did not receive this support [3,10,14]. However, a study involving Korean college students [15] reported that social support was not significantly correlated with anger. In view of the conflicting findings of previous studies, additional research examining the relationship between these variables in nursing students is required to determine the feasibility of the provision of social support as an intervention strategy for anger management in nursing students.

A grateful disposition, which is one of the characteristics of positive psychology, is another protective factor for stress and anger. In addition, it has recently attracted increased attention as a positive internal resource that contributes to physical, psychological, and social health [16,17]. According to the results of previous studies, people with a grateful disposition had positive interpersonal relationships, displayed prosocial behavior within their social networks [16,18], experienced few psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, and exhibited positive characteristics such as optimism and friendliness [19,20]. Moreover, in a study involving nursing students in Korea, life stress significantly affected grateful disposition [21], which in turn was negatively associated with anger [22]. In view of these findings, a grateful disposition is likely to play a crucial role in reducing angry reactions to stress.

Consequently, anger could be considered an emotional aspect of mental health; however, it is also connected to cognition and spiritual well-being [22]. Therefore, the identification of various relevant factors is imperative in clarifying the relationships between these factors, to ensure effective anger management. In addition, although the number of studies examining nursing students' anger has increased, further research is required. Moreover, no studies have been conducted to examine the mediating effects of protective factors, such as social support and a grateful disposition, on the relationship between anger and stress, which has been shown to be the main risk factor for anger.

The present study sought to examine the mediating effects of a grateful disposition and social support on the relationship between life stress and anger in nursing students. The first aim was to determine the levels of stress, social support, and anger of the nursing students and the strength of their grateful disposition. The second aim was to identify the relationships between life stress, social support, a grateful disposition, and anger. The third aim was to verify the mediating effect of a grateful disposition and social support on the relationship between life stress and anger.

Methods

Study design

The study involved a descriptive research design.

Setting and sample

Convenience sampling was used to recruit 180 nursing students enrolled at two different 4-year nursing colleges located in Daegu and Busan city. The required sample size was calculated as 166, with a significance level of .05 in multiple regression analysis, a medium effect size of .15, power of 95.0%, and nine predictors (i.e., nine demographic characteristics, life stress, social support, and a grateful disposition), using the G-power 3.1.5 software program (Heinrich Heine University, Dusseldorf, Germany).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the ethics review board for life science of Keimyung University (Approval no. 40525-201508-HR-62-02), and permission to collect data was granted by the deans of the colleges. The researcher visited students during their breaks to explain the purpose and content of the study, assure students that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and inform them that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty if they no longer wished to participate. All participants understood the purpose of the study, participated voluntarily, and provided written informed consent.

Measurement instruments

Life stress

Life stress was measured using the Revised Life Stress Scale for College Students developed by Chon et al [23]. The scale consists of 50 items divided among the following eight subcategories pertaining to stress resulting from negative life events experienced by students during their time at college: same-sex peer relationships (five items), opposite-sex peer relationships (six items), family relationships (six items), relationships with faculty members (six items), academic problems (seven items), financial problems (seven items), concerns regarding future careers (eight items), and problems involving personal values (five items). Responses are provided using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and higher scores indicate higher levels of life stress. Cronbach α for the subcategories ranged from .75 to .88 in the study by Chon et al [23] and .85 to .92 in the present study. In addition, Cronbach α for the overall scale was .90 in the present study.

Social support

Social support was measured using the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support developed by Zimet et al [24] and translated into Korean by Shin and Lee [25]. Responses are provided using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support. Cronbach α for the scale was .85 at the time of development, .89 in the study by Shin and Lee [25], and .92 in the present study.

Grateful disposition

The strength of each student's grateful disposition was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire-6, which was originally developed by McCullough et al [18] and translated into Korean by Kwon et al [19]. The scale consists of six questions pertaining to

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