



## Research Article

## Effect of Mentoring Program on Ways of Coping with Stress and Locus of Control for Nursing Students



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## SUMMARY

**Purpose:** This study evaluated the effectiveness of a 14-week mentoring program for first year nursing students and their ways of coping with stress and locus of control.

**Methods:** The study was designed as a quasi-experimental study. Sixty-six first year students (mentees) and 66 fourth year students (mentors) were eligible to be in the mentoring program. Mentors and mentees contacted each other weekly, as required, to provide information and support. In order to determine the efficiency of the mentoring program, a Locus of Control Scale, the Ways of Coping Inventory and Mentoring Assessment Form were filled out by mentees.

**Results:** In this study the mentoring program increased students' internal locus of control and active coping with stress. The increase in internal locus of control showed parallelism with students' behaviors of seeking social support.

**Conclusion:** It is recommended that in nursing schools, the mentoring program be used as an additional program.

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## Introduction

Stress is a considerable psychosocial factor that affects students' academic performances and states of well-being. Nursing students undergo more stress than students studying in other health-related departments (Stecker, 2004). Since most of the nursing students start to study in their departments without knowing anything about the profession, they experience adaptation problems (Kocabiyik, Mangan, & Arslan, 2005; Ünal, Gürhan, Saral, & Özbaş, 2008). In particular, first year nursing students feel difficulty in coping with stress (Kumar, 2011). The high level of stress may result in psychological distress, physical complaints, behavioral problems, and decrease in the academic achievements of student nurses (Burnard, Edwards, & Bennett, 2008; Mintz-Binder, 2007; Watson, Deary, Thompson, & Li, 2008). The students suffering from stress struggle with the stress using different coping methods (Kumar, 2011). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as constantly changing

cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Coping efforts may be directed outward toward changing the environment (problem-focused) or inward toward changing the meaning of the event (emotion-focused).

The use of students' problem-focused coping is affected by the locus of control (LOC). Students with internal LOC use more problem-focused coping (Yılmaz & Kaya, 2010). Attributing beliefs about individuals' behaviors, and the source and the results of incidents to internal and external reasons is defined as the LOC. When the LOC is internal, the individual believes that s/he may control whatever happens to him/her and these individuals believe that they may assume a high-level of responsibility in the organization of their lives. When the LOC is external, the individual believes that whatever s/he experiences is out of his/her control and s/he attributes the incidents that happen to him/her to fate, others or chance (Dağ, 2002).

In order to support students' well-being, the use of methods to increase their adaptation to the university and their academic achievements is recommended (Thyer & Bazeley, 1993; Ünal et al., 2008). Mentoring was brought to the agenda thanks to the development of new educational strategies in nursing education, and is

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used in a general sense to increase students' academic and social achievements (Byrne & Keefe, 2002; Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Price & Balough, 2001). Studies on this topic state that mentoring supports personal and professional development (Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Riley & Fearing, 2009).

Essentially, mentoring is a nurturing process, in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and personal development (Dorsey & Baker, 2004). Mentoring is promoted as a strategy for providing support, encouragement and professional vision for students (Andrews & Wallis, 1999; Gilmour, Kopeikin, & Douché, 2007).

Giordana and Wedin (2010) reported that peer mentors helped mentees, and may assist in reducing anxiety and improving confidence in clinical practice. Peer mentoring is defined as being in a mentoring relationship where the mentor and mentee are similar in terms of age and/or status (Miller, 2002). A mentoring relationship helps students become successful in the education program and cope with school stress (Dorsey & Baker, 2004). Learning to cope with stress is a useful skill for a nursing career and a life ahead. By setting priorities, planning ahead by organizing oneself, one can minimize the impact of stress (Kumar, 2011). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) used the term coping to describe the "cognitive and behavioral efforts" a person employs to manage stress, generally categorized as emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. An emotion-focused coping strategy is used when people believe that there is little that they can do or should do to change a situation. Many things in life are out of our control; it is simply not within our power to change them. Worrying and fretting about them will just create chronic stress. Problem-focused coping targets the causes of stress in practical ways, which tackles the problem or stressful situation that is causing stress, consequently directly reducing the stress. Problem-focused strategies aim to remove or reduce the cause of the stressor. It is stated that the level of stress is higher in those who use the emotion-focused coping (Watson et al., 2008).

The concept of mentoring is being discussed both in academic and clinical fields under the category of quality development in education in Turkey. Studies performed to date suggested that mentoring increased the students' adaptation to the university and nursing profession, and that the LOC shifted from external control to internal control (Abaan, Bulut, & Cihangir, 2001; Bulut, Hisar, & Demir, 2010). For our faculty, as part of the Education in Nursing Course, this study is being conducted under the name of "mentoring program". In this program, fourth year students (mentors) mentor first year nursing students (mentees) on various aspects of university life as well as those of the nursing profession.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the mentoring program on mentees' ways of coping with stress and the LOC, and specify the students' views on the mentoring program.

## Methods

### Study design

The research was organized as quasi-experimental. The main purpose of the study was to examine the effect of a mentor program on the ways of coping with stress and locus of control.

### Setting and samples

The study was conducted in the years 2010 and 2011. The first year students at the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Health

Sciences in one university and the fourth year students, who were mentors for them, constituted the population of the study. Sample selection was not preferred and all the students wishing to participate in the study were included.

In the beginning 82 mentees and 76 mentors participated in the study. Due to the differences of numbers in the first and the fourth year students, one-to-one match of students was not performed. Two mentees were assigned to six mentors with high academic achievement. At the end of the study, the questionnaires of 66 mentees, whose pretests and post-tests were completed in full, were assessed. Accordingly, the participation rate of mentees is 80.5%.

### Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the institutional review board of the Gazi University Faculty of Health Sciences. To ensure ethical clarity, all students who participated in the study were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study in the class, and an emphasis was put on the voluntary nature of their participation. Oral consent was obtained from the students before collection of the data.

### Measurements and instruments

Study data were collected through the Student Information Form, Mentoring Assessment Form, a Locus of Control Scale, and the Ways of Coping Inventory.

The Student Information Form was completed by mentees at the beginning of the mentoring program. There are 11 questions regarding the mentees' sociodemographic features, the situations causing the most stress for them and their ways of coping with stress. The questionnaire was created from the literature (Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Bulut et al., 2010; Burnard et al., 2008; Gibbons, 2010; Gilmour et al., 2007; Glass & Walter, 2000).

The Ways of Coping Inventory (WCI) was developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980) in order to determine the ways by which individuals cope with general or specific stress situations. The scale is a 30-item likert type scale. The answers to the items of the scale are given in four stages, moving from "does not apply or not used" (0) to "used a great deal" (3). A total score cannot be obtained from the scale and separate scores are calculated for subscales. The scale consists of five subgroups such as Self-Confidence Approach (SCA), Helpless Approach (HA), Submissive Approach (SA), Optimistic Approach (OA), and Seeking for Social Support Approach (SSSA). The scale measures the way of coping with two main stresses. These are the ways of "problem-focused/active" and "emotion-focused/passive". The subscales of SSSA, OA, and SCA indicate the active ways of coping, while the subscales of HA and SA indicate the passive ways of coping. Şahin and Durak (1995) have found that those who cope with stress effectively used SCA and OA more than those who do not cope with stress effectively. Cronbach's alpha of the subscales of WCI, whose psychometric evaluations were .68 for OA, .62–.80 for SCA, .64–.73 for HA, .47–.70 for SA, .45–.47 for SSSA. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha of the WCI were found to be .51 for OA, .79 for SCA, .67 for HA, .64 for SA, and .70 for SSSA.

The Locus of Control Scale (LCS) assesses the individual's belief that the results of his/her behaviors are under his/her own control or under the external focuses (e.g., chance, fate). LCS, developed by Dağ (2002), is a scale consisting of 47 total items and utilizes various LOC scales so as to be applicable to the Turkish society. Dağ performed the validity and reliability tests of the scale on university students. LCS is a 5-point Likert type scale. In the scale, 1 means *not suitable at all*, 2 means *not very suitable*, 3 means *suitable*, 4 means *quite suitable*, and 5 means *completely suitable*. The lowest possible

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