

Test anxiety among nursing students: A systematic review



April L. Shapiro MS, RN, PhD Student*

West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, USA

KEYWORDS:

Test anxiety;
Nursing education;
Systematic review

Abstract

This systematic review explores test anxiety among nursing students. Test anxiety affects 30% of nursing students and has detrimental effects on academic performance and student success. Significant effects of treatment are discussed, including hypnotherapy, aromatherapy, and relaxation. Test anxiety has multiple ramifications and is a determining factor in student success among this population. Nurse educators can have a significant impact on student outcomes by recognizing test anxiety, intervening early, and implementing effective, supportive strategies.

© 2014 National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Test anxiety affects as many as 30% of all nursing students (Driscoll, Evans, Ramsey, & Wheeler, 2009). Nursing students experience higher levels of test anxiety than other health-sciences students, especially because of the high demands of nursing curricula and the struggle to balance multiple work and family responsibilities with the long hours of studying that are required for success (Beggs, Shields, & Janiszewski Goodin, 2011; Evans, Ramsey, & Driscoll, 2010). These demands create a high-stress environment in which students are expected to be successful.

Test anxiety can stem from inadequate test preparation, discomfort with the testing situation despite sufficient knowledge of the material, and/or inaccurate perceptions

regarding test-taking skills (Beggs et al., 2011). Students with test anxiety perceive a test as a threat, often experiencing task-irrelevant thoughts that tend to evoke negative feelings of fear, helplessness, and a sense of failure (Oermann & Gaberson, 2009). Thus, students who are otherwise capable of learning and succeeding may perform poorly because of the debilitating effects of examination anxiety (Ainsworth et al., 2010; Baker, Ainsworth, Torgerson, & Torgerson, 2009).

Signs and symptoms of test anxiety fall into three categories: physical, emotional, and cognitive (Oermann & Gaberson, 2009). The heightened autonomic response causes symptoms ranging from perspiration and headaches to severe gastrointestinal disturbances and tachycardia (Oermann & Gaberson, 2009). Students experience debilitating changes in feelings and mood brought on by test-associated stress and anxiety, including dread and panic (Oermann & Gaberson, 2009), sometimes to the point of paralyzing the student with fear (Prato, 2009). Impaired concentration, easy distractibility, difficulty recalling stored information, and misreading test information heighten students' existing fears associated with failure (Oermann & Gaberson, 2009). These disturbances have detrimental effects on students' physical and emotional well-being.

Grant Support: None. Financial Assistance: None. Previous Presentation: None.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: aprilshapiro1@gmail.com

There are numerous strategies for managing test anxiety. Increasing students' mastery over the material and confidence in their ability to test is the initial step toward ameliorating the problem and empowering students to succeed. Progressive relaxation, guided reflection, and autogenic training are techniques that may lead to positive outcomes for those dealing with examination-related stress (Beggs et al., 2011; Kanji, White, & Ernst, 2006; Prato, 2009). Extensive support systems are critical and include tutors and peer-based student support networks (McWatters, 2009). However, educators must be aware that students report many physical (cost, time, and place) and mental (feelings of unease and stigma) obstacles deterring them from seeking help professionally for test anxiety treatment (Markman, Balik, Braunstein-Bercovitz, & Ehrenfeld, 2011).

1.2. Significance

Test anxiety can have detrimental effects on students' overall success in a nursing program. This anxiety may interfere with students' ability to achieve academic excellence and often contributes to feelings of failure and incompetence (Edelman & Ficarelli, 2005). Exploring test anxiety and its effects on nursing students' success are critical first steps in understanding its full ramifications. With further insight, students and nurse educators, working collaboratively, may be able to reduce the incidence of test anxiety, improve student retention rates, and promote feelings of empowerment and renewed sense of self in those at risk. With early assessment, recognition, and intervention, improved outcomes and higher success rates among nursing student populations may become commonplace.

2. Method

2.1. Purpose

The purpose of this review was to explore factors associated with test anxiety among nursing students. Attention to these factors may promote understanding of the psychological distress associated with the testing experience and emphasize the need for more thorough assessment, screening, and treatment in this population. Nursing implications and recommendations for future research are proposed.

2.2. Design

A systematic review of the literature was conducted. This included an analysis of all relevant studies identified from the literature. Both quantitative and qualitative studies measuring or exploring test anxiety were included.

2.3. Search methods

A literature search was conducted in the CINAHL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO databases utilizing the search terms *test anxiety*, *exam anxiety*, and *examination anxiety*, each paired with *nursing students*. Limits on humans and English language were set. Publication dates were narrowed to the years 2002–2012.

2.4. Search outcome

The initial search with the keywords, *test anxiety* and *nursing students* yielded 18 results. After abstract review, 10 of the articles were excluded because they did not meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Utilized a quantitative or qualitative research method;
- Collected data from a sample that was predominantly or all nursing students; and
- Measured and reported test anxiety statistics, using a standardized anxiety tool, or explored students' lived experiences related to test anxiety.

A second search was conducted using the keywords, *exam anxiety* and *nursing students*, resulting in two additional studies that met the inclusion criteria. A third, and final, search was conducted with the keywords, *examination anxiety* and *nursing students*, yielding two more studies. After full-text review of the 12 studies, they were found to meet the inclusion criteria. The flow of information is presented in Fig. 1.

2.5. Data abstraction and synthesis

The matrix method (Garrard, 2011) was applied in the data extraction process; the criteria are presented in Table 1. The resulting data were placed on a literature matrix for ease in analysis and synthesis (Garrard, 2011; see Table 2). Meta-analysis was not appropriate because of the statistical heterogeneity among results in the studies, specifically because of variations in sample sizes, chosen variables, and results (Polit & Beck, 2012).

3. Results

Twelve studies were analyzed and synthesized for this review. The literature matrix used to evaluate the quality of the evidence is presented in Table 2. The majority of the studies were conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. Most of the studies were conducted by multidisciplinary teams (nursing, psychology, and/or education). Based on primary author, eight of the studies were conducted by nursing (see Table 2).

Ten of the studies were quantitative in nature. Seven of these quantitative studies were experimental or quasi-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2682802>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2682802>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)