



Review

Examining stress perceptions and coping strategies among Saudi nursing students: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Stress is a perennial problem in nursing education and Saudi student nurses are not immune. Despite the growing literature examining stress in Saudi student nurses, a broader perspective on this concept has not been explored. This paper is a report of a review systematically appraising and synthesizing existing scientific articles reporting stress perceptions and coping styles in Saudi student nurses.

Design: A systematic review method guided this review.

Data Sources: Four (SCOPUS, CINAHL, PubMed, Ovid) bibliographic databases were searched to locate relevant articles.

Review Methods: An electronic database search was performed in August 2017 to locate studies published from 2010 onwards. The search words included: “stress” OR “psychological stress”, “coping” OR “psychological adaptation”, “Saudi Arabia”, “student”, and “nurse”. Eleven (11) articles met the inclusion criteria.

Results: Review of the findings showed moderate to high stress levels in Saudi student nurses that originated mainly from heavy workloads and taking care of patients. However, when the students' demographic characteristics were taken into account, inconclusive results were found, although some evidence showed higher stress levels in higher level students. Both active and passive coping styles were used by nursing students when dealing with stress.

Conclusions: Consistent with international studies, Saudi student nurses experience a considerable levels of stress from various sources. Findings may provide a direction for nursing faculty in formulating stress interventions that are empirically tested and culturally appropriate.

1. Introduction

Nurse education is acknowledged as a challenging yet inherently stressful field of study. As an important issue in nurse education, stress is broadly defined as a “situation in which internal demands, external demands or both are appraised as taxing or exceeding the adaptive or coping resources of an individual or group” (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988, p. 19). In particular, the clinical requirement of courses which are vital for the acquisition and growth of fundamental nursing competencies required when student nurses assume the professional nursing role is regarded as the major source of stress (Killam and Heerschap, 2013; Lawal et al., 2016).

There is a growing body of literature which suggests that many students undertaking a nurse education program experience

considerable stress compared to students in other educational fields. International studies have indicated that student nurses are frequently exposed to significantly high levels of stress that ranges from moderate to severe during nursing clinical practice (Blomberg et al., 2014; Hamaideh et al., 2017; Labrague et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). A myriad of factors had been identified that induce stress in student nurses and the literature categorizes these into academic and clinical. Stress associated with academic activities of students include examinations, clinical reports, research projects, class assignments, low grades than expected, and poor interpersonal relationships with nursing faculty members (Eswi et al., 2013; Labrague, 2014; Pulido-Martos et al., 2012). Clinical sources of stress include worry over taking care of patients including dying patients and patients with terminal illnesses (Ajweh et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2015), paucity of

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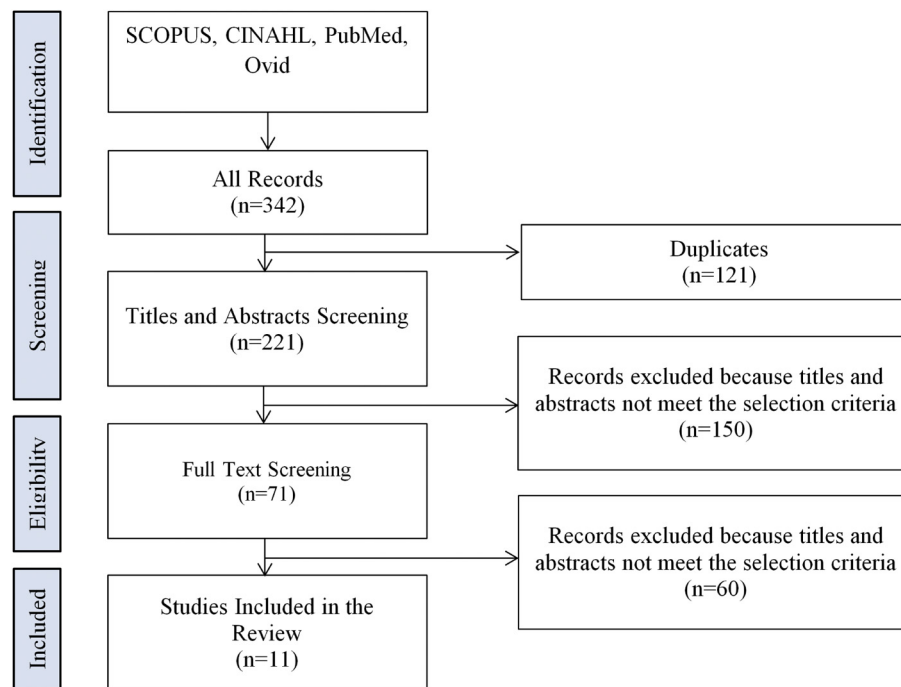


Fig. 1. Diagram of the process used to identify references for the systematic review.

nursing knowledge and skills, clinical incompetence, fear of making errors or mistakes (Labrague, 2014; Pulido-Martos et al., 2012; Wolf et al., 2015), interpersonal conflicts with peers and senior nursing colleagues, fear of relating inefficiently with patients and their families, fear of the unknown, new clinical settings, lack of familiarity with patients' medical history, diagnosis and treatment, work overloads, carrying out of multiple clinical procedures such as fear of administering medications to children, and the outcome of patient care (Labrague et al., 2017c; Pulido-Martos et al., 2012; Yamashita et al., 2012).

Chronic exposure to stress is attributed to some adverse consequences on the overall health, well-being, and quality of life of student nurses (Labrague et al., 2017d). Effective coping strategies are essential to overcome the stressors while still attaining goals (Labrague et al., 2017b; Samson-Akpan et al., 2017). Active coping can be helpful in handling stressful situations and it also acts as a moderator to mitigate the negative consequences of stress on health (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Although recent review of evidence showed a higher inclination to utilizing problem focused-coping approaches such as problem solving behaviors, and support seeking (Labrague et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), still some studies reported a higher utilization of passive coping among student nurses (Ajweh et al., 2015; Bam et al., 2015). Strengthening positive coping skills are therefore vital for nursing students to effectively deal with various stressors.

Saudi student nurses are not immune to various stressors during nursing education. In fact, several studies were conducted to examine their stressors and their coping styles (Aedh et al., 2015; Alsaqri, 2017; Hamaideh et al., 2017; Mahfouz and Alsahli, 2016; Mohamed and Ahmed, 2012). However, a broader perspective on this concept, which is a vital step when formulating stress and coping interventions, have not been explored. Thus, the aim of this systematic review was to systematically appraise and synthesize existing scientific articles reporting stress perceptions and coping styles in Saudi student nurses.

2. Nursing situations in Saudi Arabia

The nursing shortage is a perennial problem in Saudi Arabia. Just like other countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is experiencing a shortage of nurses. In 2012, the Ministry of Health reported that there

were forty eight (48) nurses per ten thousand (10,000) individuals. This ratio is significantly higher, or a 36% increase from 2006 statistics, however, still lower when compared to other developed nations (Alghamdi and Urden, 2016).

With the increasing demand for healthcare as a consequence of an increasing population and life expectancy in the country, several mechanisms were employed to attract Saudi nationals into the nursing workforce (Aboshaiqah, 2016). However, despite this, retaining and attracting Saudi nationals remains a big challenge. The intake and retention of nursing nationals into the nursing program is significantly influenced by several factors such as negative public attitudes towards the nursing profession (Aboshaiqah, 2016), language barriers (Lamadah and Sayed, 2014) and in most cases the perception of the profession as a stressful field (Al Mutair and Redwan, 2016; Lamadah and Sayed, 2014). Stressful experiences during nursing education may have a negative impact on the Saudi nursing workforce as this may prevent prospective nurses from joining the nursing profession. It is therefore vital, that teachers and the nursing staff assist and support Saudi student nurses by adopting positive coping behaviors to effectively deal with stressors.

3. Methods

3.1. Search Strategy

An electronic search of original articles published from 2010 onwards was conducted using four (4) databases: SCOPUS, CINAHL, PubMed, Ovid. Search and MeSH terms used included: "stress" OR "psychological stress", "coping" OR "psychological adaptation", "Saudi Arabia", "student", and "nurse". In addition to an electronic search, manual searches of references of relevant articles were performed. Fig. 1 shows the flow diagram utilized in searching the literature and selection of the relevant literature.

3.2. Search Criteria

Articles were included if: (1) the main objective was to examine stress and coping styles among baccalaureate student nurses in Saudi

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