

Sources of Stress and Its Levels among Nursing Students during Attending Adult Nursing Clinical Placement

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Abstract: Stress is the process by which an individual reacts when exposed to external or internal problems and challenges. Stress has direct effect on all body systems, and it could result in many health problems. Stress in nursing education and clinical training is confirmed as one of the most pressing problems worldwide recently. Nursing clinical placement, especially in adult nursing has various challenges that could lead to very stressful feeling among nursing students. This study aims to study sources of stress and its levels among nursing students during attending adult nursing clinical placement. **Method:** A descriptive research design was adopted to conduct this study. **Subjects:** All students enrolled in second year were recruited from the Faculty of Nursing at the British University in Egypt for participation in this study. **Data Collection Tools:** Data were collected through using three tools as follows; first tool: Student's Demographic Data Assessment Tool, second tool: Stress Sources Assessment Tool; and third tool: Stress Related Signs and Symptoms Assessment Tool. **Results:** This study stated that, almost fifty percent of the studied sample had moderate level of stress during clinical placement. With regard signs and symptoms related to stress; the current study showed that, more than fifty percent of the studied sample developed physical signs and symptoms from stress. Meanwhile, more than one third of the studied sample developed moderate signs and symptoms from stress. **Conclusion and Recommendations:** The findings of the present study indicate that nursing students experienced different levels of stress, and the most common signs and symptoms result from stress are physical complains. This study recommended conducting further research to assess the coping strategies used by students. In addition, deliver series of sessions about different clinical teaching strategies for demonstrators that qualify them to deal with students who faced different stressors during clinical placement.

Keywords: clinical practice– factors – nursing students – stress.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a very recent study, stress is defined as “a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the discrepancy between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those demands” (*Essel & Owusu, 2017*). Earlier, stress was defined by *Shultz (2011)* as an emotional/psychological and physiological response to an environmental demand that occurs after an individual perceives that he/she is not able to adequately adapt with the present demand. Stress affects every individual and has a powerful impact on the mind and on an individual's health and well-being as identified by *Liu et al. (2015)*.

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Nursing is a demanding profession with prolonged levels of stress that account for crucial effect observed among nurses. Clinical practice is a vital element in nursing students' education. However, during clinical practice, students face difficult situations which often result in stress. Nursing students experience numerous stressors from a variety of sources such as; academic demands, being away from home and financial pressure. Balancing work schedules, preparing for exams, taking exams, and balancing personal life with the demands of studying in the university are all potential stressors in students' life (Nicolas *et al.*, 2013).

Clinical practice is an important aspect of nursing education as it is the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practice and the cornerstone of nursing as a health profession. Effective clinical practice is gained through a supportive clinical environment which includes the clinical placement environment and the relationships with hospital staff (Lawal *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, the students may face stressors like social, environmental, academic, emotional, personal, and family. These stressors might disturb the learning ability and academic achievement of the students. The most often reported stressors were failure and uncertainty related to performance and expectations for clinical placement (Parveen, & Inayat, 2017).

In addition, there are other sources that could lead to stress such as; fear of making mistakes and interactions with hospital staff members, and dealing with patients and their families. Therefore, stress has many consequences and negative impacts on students' physical and mental/psychological health and hinders academic achievement and clinical performance (Mohamed, & Ahmed, 2012; Alzayat, & Al Gamal 2014; Mahfouz & Alsahli, 2016; Turner, & McCarthy, 2017).

Significance of the Study:

High level of stress proved that it could affect performance of nursing students during clinical placement. In addition, it might have significant consequences on their thinking and learning. In several literatures, it had been proved that students with high level of stress have difficulties in their education, which result in variety of emotional/psychological and physical health-related problems (Khater *et al.*, 2014) & Akhu-Zaheya *et al.*; (2015). Therefore, the findings of this study will help to identify the most potential sources of stress among nursing students at the Faculty of Nursing, and this will help in developing stress resolution plan and coping strategies that could motivate nursing students to overcome these stressors, and this will consequently have positive effect on students' performance and achievement during clinical placement, and protect them from developing stress related health problems (Abasimi *et al.*, 2015).

Aim of the Study:

To study sources of stress and its levels among nursing students during attending adult nursing clinical placement.

Research Questions:

1. What are the sources of stress among nursing students during attending adult nursing clinical placement?
2. What are the levels of stress among nursing students during attending adult nursing clinical placement?
3. What are the signs and symptoms resulting from stress among nursing students during attending adult nursing clinical placement?

2. METHOD**Study Design, and Setting:**

This study utilized a descriptive study design and was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, in the British University in Egypt. The study started in April 2017 and completed by December 2017.

Sample type, and Size:

The researcher recruited all second year students, who are studying adult nursing and agreed to participate in the study. The total number of the cohort was 131, and 10% (13 students) from them were involved in the pilot study. Therefore, they were excluded from the main study sample. The total working number of the students included in the study was 118.

3. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Data in this study were collected by using three tools, **First tool; Student's Demographic Data Assessment Tool**; it was developed by the researcher to assess gender, age, marital status, residence, living with whom, pre university education, interested in studying nursing, and financial independency. **Second tool; Stress Sources Assessment Tool**; adopted from Perceived Stress Scale (*Cohen et al, 1983*), to assess sources of stress among the students, and the researcher did some modifications to make it more simple and easy to be understood. This tool contains 51 items and subdivided into 7 sections used to assess different stress potential sources among students as follows; stress sources related to academic activities (6 items), stress sources related to demonstrators (5 items), stress sources related to students' relation with their peers (6 items), stress sources related to patients and their families (8 items), stress sources related to hospital and clinical placement environment (8 items), stress sources related to personal issues (16 items), and stress sources related to workload during clinical placement (2 items).

Scoring System:

The scoring system for total sources of stress assessment tool and its levels was done by using three point Likert scale ranging from 1 (low) to 3 (high). The possible scores ranged from (51-153) and if the score of the responses is allocated between (51-101), this means the nursing student had low stress level; and if the score of the responses is 102, this means the nursing student had moderate stress level. While, if the score of the responses is allocated between (103-153) this means the nursing student had high stress level.

Third tool: Stress Related Signs and Symptoms Assessment Tool: Adopted from Physio-Psycho-Social Response Scale (*Sheu et al, 1997*), it includes 20 items, to assess signs and symptoms resulting from stress among students and its levels such as; emotional/psychological problems that might be expressed by the following; worry fear, anxious, and depression. Communication and social problems that might be expressed by; negative feeling of being not needed or devalued, and physical signs and symptoms that expressed by; feeling of dizziness, nausea, vomiting, or pain.

Scoring System:

The scoring system was done by using three point Likert scale ranging from 1 (mild) to 3 (severe). The scores ranged from (20-60) and if the score of the responses is allocated between (20-39), this means the nursing students had mild signs and symptoms related to stress, while, if the score of the responses is 40 this means the nursing student had moderate signs and symptoms related to stress, and, if the score of the responses is allocated between (41-60) this means the nursing student had severe signs and symptoms related to stress.

Content Validity of Data Collection Tools:

Validity of data collection tools was done to ensure that, the content covers all the needed data to fulfill the aim of the study and to answer the research questions. The tools were reviewed by a Jury Committee that consists of three experts, Professors from Medical Surgical Nursing, to assess its completeness, relevance, and feasibility to fulfill the study aim. The Jury Committee recommended some modifications, that were done by the researcher accordingly, and after that, the tools became ready to be used.

Ethical Consideration:

The ethical aspect of this study was maintained through; obtaining official approval to conduct the study from the Research Committee in the University, and signed informed consents from the students who agreed to participate in this study, and added to this is maintaining academic honesty by using reliable literatures and proper citations. In addition, the researcher assured students that participation in this study was voluntary, and they were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason. As well, the researcher informed the students that their participation or non-participation would not affect their clinical practice grades, and the confidentiality of their personal information would be protected.

Pilot Study:

A pilot study was done to test the applicability and feasibility of data collection tools, as well as to estimate the time needed to fill in the tools. Therefore, the pilot study sample was done by including 10% of students, who were excluded from the main study sample.

Field Work:

A written official agreement was issued from the Dean of the Faculty of Nursing, and then, signed consents from the students were obtained. The following phases have been done in order to conduct the current study:

Preparatory Phase:

In this phase, the researcher reviewed from the national and international literatures, and then designed the data collection tools and asked the Jury Committee to assess them, and based on their judgments, the researcher did the needed modifications and obtained their approval the tools are ready to be utilized. In addition, in this phase the researcher explained to the students the aim of the study and data collection tools, as well the process of data collection and what is needed from them is to fill in the data collection tools.

Implementation phase:

In this phase the researcher distributed the first tool to the students to assess their demographic data, and after the students finished their clinical placement, the researcher met them in the Faculty and explained to them the other two data collection tools that were distributed to be filled in, and asked them to return it back within two days. With regard to filling in the data collection tools, the researcher notified the students about the importance of being objective, while filling in these tools in order to rely on the data that will be collected.

Statistical analysis:

Statistical analysis was done using a computer software, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20 that was used for this purpose. Descriptive correlation statistics were applied (Mean, Standard Deviation, Frequency and Percentage), and test of significance. Chi-square was used to test significance between variables. A statistically significant difference was considered at $P\text{-value} \leq 0.05$, and a highly statistically significant difference was considered at $P\text{-value} \leq 0.001$.

4. RESULTS

As indicated in table (1), 61% of the students under study were males. In relation to mean of age of the studied sample, it was 20.3 ± 1.44 . Meanwhile, 94.9% of the students were single. In addition, 53.4% of them are living with their colleagues. Moreover, the current study showed that, 91.5% of the students are interested in studying nursing. With regard to residence of the studied sample, this study results showed that, 50% of the students are living in El Shourk City away from their homes. The present study showed that, 78.8% of them are financially dependent on their families.

In table (2), the present study results reported that, 31.1%, 48.2%, and 20.7% of the studied sample had low, moderate, and high stress levels respectively in relation to different sources of stress, which faced them during clinical placement.

In table (3), the current study findings showed that, 37.9%, 45.6%, and 16.5% of the studied sample had mild, moderate, and severe emotional/psychological signs and symptoms respectively related to stress, meanwhile, 36.2%, 50.1%, and 13.7% of them had mild, moderate, and severe social signs and symptoms respectively related to stress. With regard to physical signs and symptoms related to stress, the same table showed that, 56.6%, 34.3%, and 9.1% of the studied sample had mild, moderate, and severe physical signs and symptoms respectively related to stress.

In table (4), this study results reported that, 44.8%, 42.5%, and 12.7% of the studied sample had mild, moderate, and severe signs and symptoms respectively as regard to overall signs and symptoms related to stress.

In table (5), this study findings stated that, there is a highly statistically significant relation between gender and stress level at $P = 0.040$ ($P < 0.001$). In addition, there is a highly statistically significant relation between age groups of the studied sample and level of stress that they faced during clinical placement at $P = 0.027$ ($P < 0.001$). With regard to the remaining items of demographic data, this study result showed that, there are no statistically significant relations between them and stress levels ($P > 0.05$).

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In table (6), the current study results reported that, there is a highly statistical significant relation between age of the studied sample and stress related signs and symptoms at $P = 0.027$ ($P < 0.001$). Meanwhile, the same table revealed that, there are no statistically significant relations between stresses related signs and symptoms and the remaining items of demographic data ($P > 0.05$).

Results:

Table (1): Demographic Characteristics of the Students under this Study (n= 118)

Demographic data	No	%
Gender:		
Male	72	61
Female	46	39
Age in years:		
< 20	42	35.6
20 - < 23	74	52.7
23 +	2	1.7
$\bar{x} \pm SD \quad 20.3 \pm 1.44$		
Marital status:		
Single	112	94.9
Engaged	6	5.1
Residence:		
El Shouruk City	59	50.0
Cairo	35	29.7
others	24	20.3
Living with someone:		
Family	40	33.9
Relatives	6	5.1
Colleagues	63	53.4
Alone	9	7.6
Pre-university education:		
Public	91	77.1
Private	27	22.9
Interest in studying nursing:		
Interested	108	91.5
Not interested	10	8.5
Financial independency:		
Independent	25	21.2
Dependent	93	78.8

Table (2): Students' Report about Stressors during their Clinical Placement (n=118)

Item	Low		Moderate		High	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Stress related to academic activities	161	22.7	319	45.1	228	32.2
Stress related to demonstrator	198	33.5	260	44.1	132	22.4
Stress related to their relation with Peers	245	34.6	324	45.8	139	19.6
Stressors related to their relation with patients and their families	298	31.6	482	51	164	17.4
Stress related to hospital environment	281	30	470	50	193	20
Stress related to personal issues	640	34	917	49	331	17
Stress related to workload	44	18.6	132	56	60	25.4
Total No. of all responses= 51 * 118 = 6018	1867	31.1	2904	48.2	1247	20.7
Total percentage of each category = total of each category * 100 \ total number of responses						

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Table (3): Students' Report about Experienced Stress Related Signs and Symptoms during their Clinical Placement (n=118)

#	Signs & symptoms	Mild		Moderate		Severe	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Emotional/psychological signs & symptoms:							
1	I tend to be worried and nervous	39	33.1	63	53.4	16	13.6
2	I tend to be anxious lately	36	30.5	63	53.4	19	16.1
3	I often feel depressed and miserable	36	30.5	51	43.3	31	26.3
4	I feel a afraid without any reason	60	50.8	43	36.4	15	12.7
5	I feel I am going to have a nervous breakdown	44	37.3	56	47.5	18	15.3
6	I cannot calm down	53	44.9	47	39.8	18	15.3
Total No. of responses in this category = 6 * 118 = 708		268	37.9	323	45.6	117	16.5
Social signs & symptoms:							
1	I do not like to communicate with others	48	40.7	54	45.8	16	13.6
2	I live in isolation from others	38	32.2	60	50.8	20	16.9
3	I cannot work as usual with colleagues	40	33.9	63	53.4	15	12.7
4	I have difficulty in making decisions	45	38.1	59	50	14	11.9
5	I do not feel needed or valued	47	39.8	58	49.2	13	11
6	I cannot be engaged with others as before	38	32.2	61	51.7	19	16.1
Total No. of responses in this category = 6 * 118 = 708		256	36.2	355	50.1	97	13.7
Physical signs & symptoms:							
1	I often feel dizzy	59	50	48	40.7	11	9.3
2	I experience nausea and vomiting	72	61	38	32.2	8	6.8
3	I often have vertigo and feel dizzy	60	50.8	47	39.8	11	9.3
4	I feel pressure in the chest	67	56.8	43	36.4	8	6.8
5	My fingers and toes feel numb or painful	77	65.3	32	27.1	8	7.6
6	I have stomach ache and diarrhea	78	66.1	32	27.1	8	6.8
7	I have difficulties in breathing for no reason	64	54.2	44	37.3	10	8.5
8	I catch cold more often	57	48.3	40	33.9	21	17.8
Total No. of responses in this category = 8 * 118 = 944		534	56.6	324	34.3	86	9.1

Table (4) Overall Stress Related Signs and Symptoms as Experienced and Reported by the Students under the Study (n=118)

#	Signs & symptoms	Mild		Moderate		Severe	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Emotional signs & symptoms		268	37.9	323	45.6	117	16.5
Behavioral signs & symptoms		256	36.2	355	50.1	97	13.7
Physical signs & symptoms		534	56.6	324	34.3	86	9.1
Total No. of all responses = 20 * 118 = 2360							
Total percentage of each category = total of each category * 100 / total number of responses		1058	44.8	1002	42.5	300	12.7

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Table (5): Relation between Stress Levels and Demographic Data of the Studied Sample (n=118)

Items		Stress levels		
		Low	Moderate	High
Gender:		No	No	No
Female		16	41	15
Male		19	16	11
Significant test	X ²	6.420		
	P-value	0.040 highly significant		
Age in years:				
< 20		11	21	10
20 -< 23		24	35	15
23 +		0	1	1
Significant test	X ²	23.076		
	P-value	0.027 significant		
Previous experience in nursing				
Had experience		14	29	17
Did not have experience		21	28	9
Significant test	X ²	3.846		
	P-value	0.146		
Financial independency:				
Yes		8	11	6
No		27	46	20
Significant test	X ²	0.236		
	P-value	0.889		
Interest in adult nursing:				
Interested		33	51	24
Not interested		2	6	2
Significant test	X ²	0.674		
	P-value	0.714		
Residence:				
El shouruk City		15	32	12
Cairo		12	16	7
Others		8	9	7
Significant test	X ²	2.474		
	P-value	0.649		
Living with				
• Family		12	17	11
• Relatives		3	3	0
• Colleagues		18	31	14
• Alone		2	6	1
Significant test	X ²	4.306		
	P-value	0.635		

Table (6): Relation between Stress Related Signs and Symptoms and Demographic Data of the Studied Sample (n=118)

Items		Stress related signs & symptoms		
		Mild	Moderate	Severe
Gender:		N	N	N
Female		27	36	9
Male		25	15	6
Significant test	X ²	3.779		
	P-value	0.151		
Age in years:				
< 20		18	15	9
20 -< 23		34	34	6
23 +		0	2	0
Significant test	X ²	23.076		
	P-value	0.027 highly significant		

Experience in adult nursing:				
Had experience		23	27	10
Did not have experience		29	24	5
Significant test	X ²	2.502		
	P-value	0.286		
Financial independency:				
Yes		13	9	3
No		39	42	12
Significant test	X ²	0.848		
	P-value	0.654		
Interest in nursing:				
Interested		48	46	14
Not interested		4	5	1
Significant test	X ²	0.220		
	P-value	0.896		
Residence:				
El shouruk City		23	29	7
Cairo		17	13	5
Others		12	9	3
Significant test	X ²	1.762		
	P-value	0.779		
Living with:				
Family		15	16	9
Relatives		4	2	0
Colleagues		29	28	6
Alone		4	5	0
Significant test	X ²	7.138		
	P-value	0.308		

5. DISCUSSION

Stress is a global phenomenon that affects everyone. The incidence of stress among students can have serious and negative effect on their health. Stress among nursing students is an area of growing concern and it may result in, emotional/psychological problems, physical signs and symptoms and communication and social problems, as well as poor academic achievement and impairment of performance during students' clinical placement.

This study showed that, slightly more than three fifth of the studied sample are males, most of the studied sample are interested in studying nursing. In relation to financial independency, more than three quarter of the studied sample is financially dependent on their families.

The current study revealed that, less than half of the studied sample has moderate level of stress related to academic activities. This finding can be explained as: the nursing students in second year at the Faculty of Nursing in the British University are taught by different challenging educational systems in comparison to their peers in other governmental/private universities. In addition, they have many academic obligations related to other subjects beside the nursing subject. Meanwhile, they still have inadequate knowledge and skills in clinical placement, and they still have no skills of time management in order to balance their time between academic activities and clinical placement. This finding is supported by *Al Zayyat and Al-Gamal (2014) & Gazder et al; (2014)*, who stated that, academic demand during clinical practice and caring for patients and their families are considered to be the highest reported stressors among nursing students.

Furthermore, this study reported that, more than two fifth of the studied sample had moderate stress level regarding their relation with demonstrators who are attending with them clinical placement. This could be due to that: demonstrators might deal with the students in firm way, and they have close supervision on the students all the time during clinical placement, which might put the students under stress. This finding is accordance with those of *Changiz et al; (2012) &*

Lawal et al. (2016) who mentioned that, clinical staff and educators are those who offer support to the student during clinical placement; this might increase anxiety and stress levels among nursing students in their clinical placement.

Moreover, the present study revealed that, less than half of the students under study had moderate stress regarding relation with their peers. This might be due to that all the students are competing among themselves, and each one of them is trying to have better achievement than his/her peers which is considered as source of stress. This result is congruent with those of *Kaneko and Momion (2015)*, who stated that, peer relationships in clinical placement are unique stress factor among nursing students due to competition attitude among them.

This study showed that, slightly more than half of the studied sample had moderate level of stress related to their relationship with the patients and their families. This is could be attributed to that: the students have lack of communication skills and lack of experience to deal with the patients with different medical conditions and their family members. This is congruent with *Shrestha (2013) & Aedh et al; (2015)*, who proved that, patients with different health problems are found as source of emotional/psychological stress among nursing students.

With regard to hospital environment as a source of stress among nursing students, this study finding reported that, half of the students have moderate stress level related to hospital environment. This could be explained as: the students have not long time experience in clinical placement and they are not used to stay in the hospital for long time, as well as hospital atmosphere might not be comfortable for them. This finding is in the same line with that of *Kumar (2011)*, who mentioned that, the students who are being placed in unfamiliar environment as the hospital, and living away from their families all these reasons could make them feel stressed.

In relation to personal-related sources that lead to stress, the current study showed that, almost half of the studied sample have moderate stress level due to personal reasons. This might be explained as follows; the students have different personality traits, and different ways of dealing with stress. As well, they are still young to be able to cope with stress. This finding is supported by that of *Khater et al. (2014) and Abasimi et al. (2015)*, who stated that, the students have different characteristics and they might have lack of knowledge and skills which might affect on their stress level.

With regard to workload during clinical placement, this study result proved that, more than half of the studied sample had moderate stress level related to assigned work load during clinical placement. This might be attributed to: lack of time management among the students, so they are not able to perform all required tasks. In addition, the students might be instructed from their demonstrator to do extra work and extra tasks during clinical placement. This finding is in the same line with that of *Khater et al. (2014)*, who reported that, exposing of the students to workload and performing skills and paper work during clinical practice could make them have higher stress level.

In relation to signs and symptoms related to stress, this study presented that, around half of the studied sample had moderate complaint of emotional and psychological signs and symptoms. This is due to that stress has significant effect on different body systems as well on general health. This finding is supported with those of *Sharma & Kaur (2011) & Karaca et al. (2017)*, who mentioned that, emotional stress, physical complaint and poor health, all these are very common symptoms and problems could result from stress.

With regard to relation between stress levels and demographic data, this study result proved that, there is statistically significant relation between stress levels and female gender. This might occur due to that female always have feeling of responsibilities toward their learning and achievement better than male students. This finding is in agreement with those of *Martos et al; (2011) & Singh et al. (2013)*, who reported that, stress levels are higher among female students due to different pattern of psychological morbidity as males are simply less expressive of their concerns.

The current study finding showed that, there is statistically significant relation between stress levels and age of the studied sample. This could be interpreted as follows, the students at the beginning of their study at the University are still young and not well matured enough to face different stressors, so they are very fragile to face and be affected by stress. This finding is in the same line with those of *Mahfouz and Alsahli (2016)*, who proved that, stress level among nursing students is found at age of 20s years in its highest level. With regard to the relation between stress levels and other demographic data as living with whom, and residence, the current study result showed that, there are no statistically significant relations between stress levels and other demographic data. In disagreement with this finding, *Kumar (2011) & Labrague (2013)*, who mentioned that, living alone, separation from the family and demand for making new social life make students face too much stress.

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Meanwhile, this study result reported that, there is a statistically significant relation between age of the studied sample and stress related signs and symptoms. This could be attributed to that: the students in the studied sample are still young did not care by their health appropriately and in relation to their nutritional habits as well, and they still are not well matured psychologically, which make them very vulnerable to stress. This finding in disagreement with that of *Ab Latif & Nor (2016) & Saleh et al. (2017)*, who stated that, there is no link between perceived stress and age, and no associations between these two variables.

Limitations of the Study:

The self-reported questionnaire of this study, which may increase the potential of reporting bias, was the first limitation of this study. In addition, this study sample was limited to only second year students. Therefore, this study results cannot be generalized.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study indicate that, all nursing students experienced different levels of stress due to different types of stressors. The most frequently occurring stressors among the students were related to dealing with the patients and their families, stress-related to hospital environment and finally stress related to workload due to clinical placement.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that, providing psychological, and social support to the students who have stress, encourages students to pay attention to manage their time in order to able to manage their studies during clinical placement. A further research is recommended to assess the coping strategies used by student nurses. Furthermore, delivering series of sessions about different clinical teaching strategies for demonstrators in order to qualify them to deal with students who faced different stressors during clinical placement. Finally, stress management workshop is important to enhance students' awareness in relation to dealing with different stressors.

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