

Collaboration between universities and nursing placement providers is essential to ensure the wellbeing of the future nursing workforce.

Commentary: J Aloufi, M. A., Jarden, R. J., Gerdtz, M. F., Kapp, S., 2021 Reducing stress, anxiety and depression in undergraduate nursing students: Systematic review. *Nurs Ed Today*. 102, 104877¹

Implications for practice and research

- Joint initiatives between educational settings and placement providers are required to support student nurse wellbeing
- Future research must ensure rigorous study design with planned long term follow up, to support the development of a robust body of evidence

Context

Extensive research has identified the demands of nursing on emotional and physical wellbeing² and acknowledges that mental health concerns are often reported by nurses, especially student nurses, which far exceed the stress and anxiety levels reported by other students.³ Good health and wellbeing within the profession is essential for the safe delivery of quality health care,⁴ and the use of effective interventions to reduce stress, anxiety and depressed mood amongst staff are necessary.

Methods

The study¹ utilised a systematic review, using the Joanna Briggs Institute⁵ guidelines, to investigate the effectiveness of interventions in improving mental health outcomes for nursing students. Studies published in English between 2008 to 2018 on interventions to address stress, anxiety and depressed mood in undergraduate nursing students were included. The study incorporated randomised and non-randomised control trials, experimental, quasi- experimental and pre-test and post-test. A three-step search strategy was employed. The first stage refined the search terms using the MEDLINE and CINAHL databases, the second involved a comprehensive search for relevant studies across all databases, while the third searched all the references in all the included papers. Two reviewers working independently assessed studies, which met the inclusion criteria, a third reviewer was called upon to resolve disagreements.

Findings

1579 citations were initially found and through a process of elimination 22 papers, from 11 countries, form the basis of the study. The sample size ranged from n = 34 to n = 181. A range of interventions were studied, of differing durations, using various measurement tools. Statistically significant decreases in stress or anxiety or depressed mood were noted in 18 studies. Studies incorporating mindfulness mediation, emotional freedom technique or biofeedback training were seen to be effective for both stress and anxiety while mindfulness based stress reduction and stress management programmes were seen to be effective for stress, anxiety and depression.

Commentary

Although there is extensive recognition of the mental health concerns amongst nursing students and acknowledgement that many of the interventions in this review were effective, the overall study sample was small, frequently the activity was only delivered once and often

there was a lack of longer-term evaluation, which provided little understanding of the intervention's enduring benefits. Interventions which seek to address multiple well-being concerns may be more valuable in terms of resourcing and outcomes, although appropriately trained experts must be employed, especially for interventions such as mindfulness programmes. Given the extent of student nurses experiences of stress, anxiety and depression the research body for this topic is small and the development of a stronger more rigorous evidence base is required.

The importance of staff mental health and wellbeing within healthcare is well recognised⁶ with universities seeking to deliver learning environments which enhance wellbeing amongst nursing students. However, nurse education utilises multiple and varied settings to ensure students gain a wide range of both theoretical and practical learning experiences. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing stress, anxiety and depressed mood amongst student nurses must be shared by both educational and placement providers. Frequently interventions are based in either educational or clinical settings. And therein lies the organisational challenge. To effectively develop a wellness programme to improve student mental health, it is essential that nursing educational institutions and practice placements work collaboratively at all levels and in all processes and settings, to develop pathways and mechanisms to jointly support the wellbeing of the current student population; as a means of contributing to a future healthy workforce.

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