

Problems Facing Intern Nursing Students and Its Relation with their Perceived Stress

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Abstract

Background: Internship period is very crucial for every intern nursing student as it presents the first contact with reality and helps in shaping and enhancing their clinical skills and experience. **Aim:** Assessing problems facing intern nursing students and its relation with their Perceived stress during internship year. **Subjects and Methods:** A descriptive correlational research design with a convenient sample of 303 intern nursing students at Beni Suif university hospital was recruited to conduct the study. Two data collection tools were used; the first tool was problems facing intern nursing student questionnaire, the second was perceived stress scale. **Results:** The overall mean score of problems facing intern nursing students was (145.27) with a standard deviation (11.34) with a mean percent (77.2%) indicating higher problems faced by the students. These problems were related to internship year goals and objectives, collaboration between faculty and hospital staff, collaboration approaches between faculty and hospital staff, and orientation period, etc. More than three quarters (77.5%) of intern nursing students reported high level of stress. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between intern nursing students problems and their perceived stress ($r=0.557$, $p=0.000$). **Conclusion:** There was a high level of problems faced by intern nursing students, thus increasing their stress level. These alarming problems require creative and innovative strategies to overcome. **Recommendation:** Opening continuous communication channels between faculty members, hospital staff members and students for developing solutions to get rid of these problems and to achieve the goals and objectives of the internship year effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: Intern Nursing Student, Problems, Stress.

Introduction

Nursing is the profession which provides basic patient care, and nursing staff must handle complex and specialized conditions. For providing the best care, nurses have to integrate sound theoretical knowledge and excellent practical skills (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Internship is a form of experiential learning that incorporates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and development of skills in a professional setting which gives students the opportunity to gain valuable applied

experience and make connections in the professional fields they are considering for career paths (Uche, Obiagel and Paulina., 2017).

Taylor (1988) defined internship as "Structured and career-related work experiences gained by students before graduation from academic program". Gault et al (2000) pointed out that internship "generally refer to part-time field experiences and comprises a wide range of academic disciplines and professional settings" Internship is an opportunity to enhance and foster classroom learning through practical

career-relevant work experience and whether paid or not, voluntary or mandatory or externship, internships are essential to figure a solid career and offer students hands on professional experience, real-world learning, industry exposure and résumé building skills (**Shouse and Gakhar., 2017, Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014**).

The internship year of Nursing is that the final clinical year, where Nursing students are exposed to the direct clinical experience of patient care in a healthcare setting and is part of the degree requirements. Clinical experiences comprise the rotation of nursing interns through various clinical setting for twelve months. These clinical settings include Pediatric, Adult (Medical-Surgical), Critical Care (Pediatric-Neonatal, Adult-Medical, Adult- Surgical), Operation Room, Emergency Room (ER), Obstetrics, Gynecology, Labor Dialysis (Hemodialysis, Peritoneal), and Delivery, and Endoscopy (**Althiga, Mohidin, Park and Tekian., 2017**).

It is thought that internship programs have some benefits for nursing students (by engaging in real clinical situations), workplaces, and therefore the staff (assigning some clinical tasks to students). It also initiates innovation, creativity and adaptation, greater opportunity to learn skills, enhances analytical power, and eventually develops job experience. Furthermore, internship programs can help nursing students through improving the readiness for accepting roles and enhance individual and professional abilities, self-development, and work commitment (**Esteves, Cunha, Bohomol and Santos., 2019**). Conversely, some studies have noted that internship has little effect on beliefs about health problems like

psychological health and it probably lead to health matters such as violence and anxiety (**Oren and Zengin, 2019**). Internship problems were classified as “work place” “working hours,” “insufficient supervision,” “ignorance about importance of working,” and “wages.” (**Kaşh and İlban , 2013**)

Many sources of stress are recognized when talking about intern nurses; these origins may include insufficient salaries, staff shortages, heavy workloads and unfortunate work environments because of insufficient materials and supplies in governmental health settings (**Gibson, 2004**). Moreover, Researchers postulated that the psychological effect of nursing dying or critically ill patients is additionally a major source of stress to the just graduate nurses. (**Go’rgens-Ekermans and Brand, 2012**). Another important origin of stress in the internship experience is that providing comprehensive care for patients may expose the newly graduated nurses to be involved in their patients' psychological distress besides their physical difficulties. (**Karimi et al., 2013**)

The concept of stress has been observed in many approaches. The principal approaches emphasized in literatures dealt with stress as a response, stress as an environmental stimulus, and stress as a transaction between the person and his environment. Perceived stress occurs when an individual demonstrates a feeling of helplessness to manage the stressful situation or to deal with the occurring emotional response. Therefore, in accordance to the transactional model that emphasized that stress is basically an interaction between the environment and the individual, the role of the individual's evaluation of the stressful events is crucial in shaping his responses against

the perceived stress (**Sood, Bakhshi, and Devi 2013**).

It is very critical for the novice nurses to know that stress not only cannot be avoided, but also it is considered as either positive or negative experience which requires adjustment to different changes in individual's current routine. It seems to be essential, for nurses to control their emotions and reaction to stress so as to decrease the destructive effect on both their work and their lives (**Karimi et al., 2013**). Therefore, intern nurses must use all the available resources to urge all possible positive outcomes of the stress they are exposed to and to go ahead. These resources could include using their own emotional intelligence and different coping strategies, in addition to seeking professional and social help and/or support (**Bakr, Sherif, Eid , and ELshal, 2013**).

Significance of the Study

Internship period is a rich and appreciated experience, as it is a massive opportunity for baccalaureate nursing students to gain practical skills as well as to relate their theoretical knowledge to real situations under the supervision of experienced, and supporting preceptors. Additionally, the internship year helps the graduate nurses to develop their competencies in various care specialties (**Bakr, Sherif, Eid, and ELshal, 2013; Karimi, Leggat, Donohue, Farrell, Couper, 2013**). The first contact of graduate nurses with real work life and real clinical situations was described as reality shock or upset. This shock starts as they shift from the educational to the service setting with its diverse requirements and stressors (**Halfer & Elaine, 2006**).

Intern nursing students expect a supportive clinical environment that is innovative and highly personalized in which they feel that they are an important part of the healthcare team (**Papathanasiou, Tsaras, & Sarafis, 2014**). Thus, it is vital that each individual of the healthcare team should contribute to providing a positive clinical experience which enhance the progression of the clinical skills of the nursing students (**Murphy et al., 2012**). However, the nursing students described undesirable experiences in the clinical setting that provided a negative influence on students' attitude and confidence which impeded their learning experience. Specifically, the nursing students have acknowledged that one of the obstacles to learning in the clinical setting is their poor interpersonal relationships with clinical staff and preceptors (**Shaban, Khater, & Akhu-Zaheya, 2012**).

Nursing schools should be cautious in safeguarding the students' experiences to effectively meet the clinical objectives and proficiently bridge the gap between theory and practice (**Löfmark, Thorkildsen, Råholm, Natvig, 2012**). Therefore, it is very important to explore the problems facing intern nursing student during their internship year in order to overcome it and create a supportive environment enhancing students' learning experience and accomplishing the goals and objectives of the internship year.

Aim of the Study

The current study aimed at assessing problems facing intern nursing students and its relation with their Perceived stress during internship year.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. Assessing the problems facing intern nursing students during internship year.
2. Assessing stress level perceived by the intern nursing students.
3. Assessing the relationship between problems facing intern nursing students and their perceived stress during internship year.

Research Questions

Q1: What are the problems facing intern nursing students during internship year?

Q2: What is the level of stress perceived by intern nursing students during internship year?

Q3: Is there a relationship between the problems facing intern nursing students and their perceived stress level during internship year?

Operational Definitions:

1. **Intern nursing students:** (in the context of the study), defined as new graduate nurses who have successfully completed a baccalaureate nursing degree at the faculty of nursing, Beni Suif University, and who are responsible for providing nursing care to assigned clients under the direct supervision of the faculty members. Intern nursing students who are enrolled during the year 2020-2021.
2. **Problems facing intern nursing students:** (in the context of the study), defined as the challenges and obstacles faced by the intern nursing students that hinder them from achieving the goals and objectives of the internship year effectively. Including problems related to

orientation program, collaboration between faculty staff and students, supervising approaches, evaluation approaches and so on.

3. **Perceived stress:** (in the context of the study), defined as the stress level perceived by intern nursing students during the internship year measured using Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by **Cohen et al (1983)**

Research Design

Descriptive correlational research designed was utilized for conducting the current study.

Setting

The study was carried out at Beni Suif university hospital. It is a free service hospital for all departments with a wide range of ambulatory care services such as outpatient, pharmacy, emergency, X-ray, physiotherapy. It consists of (36) units. It provides care for patient with different specialties like Medicine (General, Rheumatoid, and Neurology), Surgery (General, Neuro-Spine, Cardio-Thoracic, Plastic, Orthopedic, Nephrology, Ophthalmology, Andrology, Obstetrics and Gynecology), Cardiology, Oncology, Critical Care, Tropical and Chest. The clinical areas where intern nurses are trained include: intensive care units (ICUs), cardiac care unit (CCU), hemodialysis (HD) units, operation rooms (OR), emergency unit, premature unit, and Pediatric ICU.

Sample

All intern nursing students (303) enrolled during internship year 2020-

2021 were recruited for the study. The intern nursing students were trained for seven months at the hospital during the time of data collection.

Data Collection Tool

Two data collection tools were used for conducting the study. **First tool: “problems facing intern nursing students” questionnaire**. It was developed by the investigators based on reviewing of the related literature (Safan, & Ebrahim, 2018). It is composed of two sections; first section includes personal characteristics (e.g code, age, marital status, etc.). Second section included questions about problems facing intern nursing students during internship year (97 items). It is divided into 15 categories: internship year goals and objectives (6 items), collaboration between faculty and hospital staff (2 items), collaboration approaches between faculty and hospital staff (4 items), orientation period (7 items), hospital training units (7 items), internship year rounds (8 items), clinical application skills (9 items), supervision (26 items), evaluation (6 items), communication (7 items), schedule (8 items), monthly monetary rewards (3 items), hospital services provided to nurse interns (2 items), and uniform (2 items). Each item was scored either No (1) or Yes (2). The total score ranges from (97 – 194). Higher scores indicate higher problems while lower scores indicate lower problems perceived by the nurses’ intern.

Second tool: “Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)” developed by Cohen et al (1983). It is composed from (10 items). The questions in this scale ask the respondents about their feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, the respondents were asked to indicate how often they felt or thought a

certain way. Responses are measured on five points Likert scale ranging from 0 (never), 1 (almost never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (fairly often), to 4 (very often). Total score is obtained by calculating all items grades. Total scores are ranging from (0 – 40), with higher scores demonstrating greater perceived stress. Scoring system was high (27-40), moderate (14-26) and low stress level (0-13).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on 10% of intern nursing students in the studied hospital to assess the clarity, objectivity, applicability, and adequacy, determine possible problems in the instrument and to determine time consumed in answering the tool. Little modifications for the tools were done based on the recommendations of the subjects.

Validity and Reliability

Validity of the data collection tools was tested by five nursing experts who assessed the content, clarity, applicability, and adequacy of the tools. Modifications for the tools were done based on the recommendations of the nursing experts. Then, reliability of the tools was tested using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient which was (0.763) for problems facing intern nursing students questionnaire and (0.832) for Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) which are good score for reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Official permissions from the administrators of faculty of nursing Beni Suif University and the medical and nursing manager of Beni Suf university hospital were obtained. All intern nursing students were invited to participate in the

study. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to each participant individually and a written informed consent was obtained. The investigators informed them that participation is entirely voluntary and the possibility of withdrawing at any time without explanation of the cause. Confidentiality of the information was assured through coding of the data. Data collection occurred between April and June 2021. At the time of data collection, the intern nursing students was already spent seven months from the beginning of the internship year. Using the developed data collections questionnaires, the problems facing intern nursing students during the internship year and their perceived stress level were assessed by intern nursing students.

Statistical Design:

The collected data were coded and entered into statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 22.0). Data were presented using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages for categorical variables. Means and standard deviations were used for continuous variables. Chi-square tests were used for testing the differences among groups. Pearson correlation coefficient was used for measuring the correlation between study variables.

Results

Table (1): summarized the personal characteristics of study subjects. About two thirds of intern nursing

students (66.1%) were female, single (68.6%). More than three quarters (82.1%) of them were aged between twenty two and less than twenty four years. More than half of intern nursing students (62.04%) were rural residents.

Table (2): illustrated the mean scores of problems faced intern nursing students during internship year. The overall mean score of problems was (145.27) with a standard deviation (11.34). This score indicates that higher problems are faced by the intern nursing students. Concerning the sub-dimensions of problems, the highest mean score was for methods of supervision (21.36±3.55) and schedule (15.90±3.08), while the lowest mean score was for uniform (1.72±0.44) and hospital services provided to intern nursing students (2.18±0.39).

Table (3): revealed the stress level as perceived by intern nursing students. More than three quarters (77.5) of intern nursing students reported high level of stress. Using chi-square test there were significant statistical difference between the levels of stress ($\chi^2=606.12$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$)

Table (4): revealed the correlation coefficient between problems faced intern nursing students and their perceived stress during internship year. Using Pearson correlation coefficient, there was statistically significant positive correlation between nurses' intern problems and their perceived stress ($r=0.557$, $p=0.000$).

Table (1) Distribution of the Study Subjects According to Their Personal Characteristics ($n=303$).

Item	Nurse Interns	
	N	%
Gender:		
▪ Male	103	33.9
▪ Female	200	66.1
Age:		
▪ 20<22	48	15.8
▪ 22<24	249	82.1
▪ ≥ 24	6	2.1
Marital Status:		
▪ Single	208	68.6
▪ Married	95	31.4
Residence		
▪ Rural	188	62.04
▪ Urban	115	37.96

Table (2) Mean Score of Problems Faced Intern Nursing Students during Internship year ($n=303$).

Items	Mean \pm SD	Maximum Score
Internship Year Goals And Objectives	7.00 \pm 1.29	9
Collaboration Between Faculty And Hospital Staff	2.45 \pm 0.50	3
Collaboration Approaches Between Faculty And Hospital Staff	4.90 \pm 0.79	6
Orientation Period	9.27 \pm 1.49	12
Hospital Training Units	8.81 \pm 1.27	11
Internship Year Rounds:		
▪ Importance	10.81 \pm 3.09	16
▪ Length	13.27 \pm 2.02	16
Clinical Application Skills:		
▪ For Nurse Intern	8.45 \pm 1.63	12
▪ For Hospital Nursing Staff	4.36 \pm 1.31	6
Supervision:		
▪ Supervisor Role	13.18 \pm 1.27	15
▪ Methods Of Supervision	21.36 \pm 3.55	27
Evaluation	7.27 \pm 1.36	9
Communication:		
▪ Between Nurses Intern	6.63 \pm 1.44	8
▪ Between Nurses Intern And Faculty Staff	4.63 \pm 0.98	6
▪ Between Nurses Intern And Hospital Staff	4.34 \pm 0.87	6
Schedule	15.90 \pm 3.08	18
Monthly Monetary Rewards	3.00 \pm 0.00	3
Hospital Services Provided To Nurse Interns	2.18 \pm 0.39	3
Uniform	1.72 \pm 0.44	2
Problems Of Internship Year (Total)	145.27 \pm 11.34	188
	Mean Percent	
	(77.2)	

Table (3): Frequency Distribution of Stress Level as Perceived by Intern Nursing Students ($n=303$).

Level	Perceived Stress		χ^2	P-Value
	N	%		
High	235	77.5	606.12	0.000**
Moderate	45	14.8		
Low	23	7.7		

**A highly statistical significant difference ($P \leq 0.001$)

Table (4): Correlation between Problems Faced Intern Nursing Students and their Perceived Stress during Internship Year ($n=303$).

Items	r	p -value
Problems Vs Stress	0.557	0.000**

**A highly statistical significant difference ($P \leq 0.001$)

Discussion

Internship period is one of the most challenging and critical time period, during which nursing students actually practice in a real working environment. Through internships, Intern nursing students take their first steps into the profession to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during their education to real life situations. The skills taught at college do not go beyond theories unless they are practiced. Internship provide Nursing students with opportunities to practice what they have learned in the classroom, gain a greater understanding of the requirements, test career choices, and develop important hands-on workplace skills (Kasli & İlban., 2013) . The initial contact of graduate nurses with real work life and real clinical situations was described as reality shock or upset. This shock starts as they shift from the educational to the service setting with its different requirements and stressors. In most cases, the actual hospital settings stressors could be perceived as intolerable by the intern nurses. This reaction develops as the graduate nurses face a situation that is perceived as devastating and cannot cope up with (Bataineh, 2013).

Therefore, the current study aimed at assessing problems facing intern nursing students and its relation with their Perceived stress during internship year. To fulfill the aim of the study three research questions were formulated. The first question was about the problems facing intern nursing students, the overall mean score of internship problem was high indicating higher problems faced by intern nursing students. The highest mean score of problem dimensions was for methods of supervision, orientation periods, goal and objectives of the internship year, training rounds and scheduling and the lowest mean score was for uniform and hospital services provided to intern nursing students. These problems could be due to the incidence of COVID-19 pandemic that imposed exceptional circumstances such as lack of resources, accelerating the orientation period, and insufficient collaboration between faculty staff and students. This result was congruent with Safan and Ebrahim (2018) who found that the highest mean score of problems' dimensions were clinical setting, supervision and communication.

Consistently, this result was in the same line with Kaşh and İlban (2013)

who stated that at the study, which involved both trainees and researchers; internship problems were classified as “work place” “working hours”, “insufficient supervision,” “ignorance about importance of working,” and “wages.” Although the study was carried out in a different field, it was noted that similar problems occurred in tourism-related internship programs. The present study revealed that the highest percentage of nurses’ intern had problems in relation to role of supervisor; lack of orientation to the hospital, cannot deal with unfamiliar situations, lack of feedback, use threatened manner, answer question incomplete, inappropriate role model, behaved in an unsupportive manner. **Safaan and Ebrahim (2018)**, **Baraz, Memarian, and Vanaki (2015)** agreed with the current study.

The second research question asked about the level of stress perceived by nurses’ intern. In the current study, more than three quarters of nurses’ intern reported high level of stress. This high level could be due to the various stressors nurses’ intern exposed to during internship year such as reality shock, workload, being responsible and accountable for patients care, conflict with supervisors or patients and so on. Of course the incidence of COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the condition and increased the stress level as the intern nursing students were afraid to catch the infection themselves or transmit it to their families and relatives. The result of this study was similar to **Mousa, Menessy and Kamel (2017)** who found that almost all the studied subjects reported having a very high level of perceived stress. The third research question was about the relationship between the problems facing nurses’ intern and their perceived stress level during internship year. The current

study found a significant positive correlation between them. Similarly, **Shdaifat, Jammam and Al-amer (2018)** reported that Students perceived moderate level of stress, most teachers and nursing staff, peers and daily life, and commonly attributed to assignments and workload, taking care of patients.

Limitations

The study had some limitations. One was the descriptive correlational design in which extraneous variables cannot be controlled. Another one is incidence of COVID-19 pandemic which represent a covariate that may affect the finding of the study.

Conclusion

It was concluded that intern nursing students at Beni Suif University hospital faced many problems during the internship year. Thus, increasing the stress level perceived by the intern nursing students as there was a significant statistical correlation between problems faced intern nursing students and their perceived stress level.

Recommendations

In the light of the present study, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Opening continuous communication channels between faculty members, hospital staff members and students for developing solutions to get rid of these problems and to achieve the goals and objectives of the internship effectively and efficiently.
2. Discussion of the goal and objectives of the internship year with intern students then reformulating it to keep

- up with the ever changing healthcare requirements.
3. Designing and developing an orientation manual for the internship year regarding each training round and must be distributed to each intern at the beginning of the orientation period.
 4. Developing means for increasing the collaboration between faculty members and hospital staff.
 5. Effective communication skills should be taught to students before they enter the clinical environment with the emphasis on the differences between the clinical environment and the classroom environment.
 6. Continuous supervision and appraisal interview should be conducted with nursing interns through daily, weekly discussion and at the end of clinical experience by their immediate supervisor to discuss their performance to learn more, develop their knowledge and skills.
 7. Researchers should conduct further studies investigating problems and challenges facing intern nursing students and create innovative solutions to overcome.

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Conflict of interest:

None

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