

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Impact of counseling on self-esteem and anxiety levels among nursing students

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Received: December 21, 2014

Accepted: March 22, 2015

Online Published: April 13, 2015

DOI: 10.5430/jnep.v5n6p106

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v5n6p106>

ABSTRACT

Background: Self-esteem can be defined as a personal consideration individuals have about their feelings and their value, that is, people analyze how much they like themselves, how they see and think of themselves. Self-esteem is an important quality and a personality trait or attribute that is considered as a specific requirement for healthcare professionals during their encounters with patients that leads to better performance and positively reinforces hospital customer satisfaction. Beginning student nurses have reported a high incidence of anxiety. High levels of anxiety can affect students self esteem, learning, performance and in some cases retention within a nursing program. Not every suffering from anxiety has an anxiety disorder. That is why there is also generic counseling available for those that simply want someone to talk to.

Methods: A quasi-experimental research design was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, Minofya University. The sample consisted of 62 first year baccalaureate nursing students were recruited for this study during the first term of academic year 2012/2013. Tools of data collection, Tool 1: questionnaire sheet, Tool 2: Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES), Tool 3: Anxiety scale: Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A).

Results: The result revealed statistical significance difference between before and after intervention groups.

Conclusions: There was improvement of the levels of self-esteem and decreasing anxiety level. So the faculties of nursing can promote counseling programs via conferences, seminars and new training courses. Further studies are required to generalize the results and more programs among different nursing levels are also required.

Key Words: Self-esteem, Anxiety, Counseling, Nursing students

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is defined as one's overall evaluation of one's worth as a person high or low, based on all the positive and negative self-perceptions that make up one's own self-concept.^[1-3] The importance of self esteem lies in the fact that it concerns to ourselves. It affects the way we are and act in the world and the way we are related to everybody.^[4] Self-esteem is not static and fixed throughout the life as results of circumstances and experiences. The transition of nursing students from the secondary school to higher education rep-

resents a stressful experience and causing anxiety as they try to cope with new conditions: one of these new conditions include: establishing new friends. The nursing school years are an important period of transition from adolescents to trained nurses.^[5] The student's perceptions of nursing might have an impact on self esteem, recruitment, retention and performance.^[1] The self esteem of nursing students is often effected by their lack of skills and uncooperative attitudes toward staff. Self-esteem is linked to social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, moving away from, and dealing with dif-

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ferent educational environments. Self-esteem is an important quality and a personality trait or attribute that is considered as a specific requirement for healthcare professionals during their encounters with patients that leads to better performance and positively reinforces hospital customer satisfaction.^[6]

Low self-esteem in adolescence is a risk factor for negative outcomes in important life domains. Some studies found that low self esteem predicts antisocial behavior, eating disturbances, depression, and suicidal ideation.^[7,8] Low self esteem has a generally negative overall opinion of oneself by judging or evaluating oneself negatively. Low self esteem is a major problem in nursing profession. Nurses with healthy self-esteem are likely to deliver therapeutic patient care and display mature behaviors at the work place. Building self-esteem can help the student nurse is becoming much better person and she feels like she can do anything in the world. It can be challenging to improve self-esteem.

When self-esteem is lowered, problems like anxiety arise. Anxiety is a vague feeling, which may be defined as an uncomfortable sense of security. Anxiety is a state of uneasiness and apprehension as about future uncertainties. Causes of anxiety in nursing students are: long hours of study, feeling of inadequacy, information overload, and lack of time to meet students.^[9,10]

Beginning student nurses have reported a high incidence of anxiety. High levels of anxiety can affect students self esteem, learning, performance and in some cases retention within a nursing program.^[11,12] Issues that contribute to their anxiety include academic challenges, technological advances, financial concerns, interpersonal difficulties, family problems, physical and mental health issues and lack of coping skills.^[12] Not everyone suffering from anxiety has an anxiety disorder. That is why there is also generic counseling available for those that simply want someone to talk to. This type of counseling is extremely valuable, because it can help students that are suffering from anxiety gets more developed into an anxiety disorder and hands to cure.

Counseling is the mean by which one person helps another through purposeful conversation. Counseling is a relationship between a concerned person and a person with a need. This relationship is usually person-to-person; sometimes it may involve more than two people. The most common issues that students come to the counseling services for include depression, anxiety, low self esteem and academic concerns. Anxiety cures are a major industry. Many people look for non- medication cure to avoid significant side effects, so counseling does not require any medications. It's a natural anxiety treatment and can be completed without any medications.

1.1 Significance of the study

Self-esteem is an important quality or an attribute that is considered as a specific requirement for healthcare professionals during their encounters with patients, caregivers, healthcare members and hospital management. Self-esteem in healthcare professionals is considered as hidden competency. Nurses with healthy self-esteem are likely be able to deliver therapeutic patient care, while those with low self-esteem are less likely to do. Low self-esteem is a major problem in the nursing profession. Anxiety also usually has an effect on a student's self esteem and well-being; it may be an adverse effect. Anxiety can affect aspects of students' lives that are of the utmost importance to them including learning and performance in educational settings and professionalism after that. To our knowledge, studies among students in general have reported that psychological distress and personality influence academic performance and adjustment. Yet there is little empirical evidence of this attribute (increasing self esteem and decreasing anxiety) is fostered in preparation of nursing students. So, researchers suggest that counseling can help these students.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to improve low self-esteem, to reduce anxiety levels for first year students' nurse through counseling intervention, and to assess factors affecting low self-esteem.

1.3 Research hypotheses

- H1: Levels of self esteem will be higher than that at the end of the intervention among first year students.
- H2: Levels of anxiety will be reduced for the first year students at the end of the intervention.

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

2.1 Research design

A quasi-experimental pre- post-test design was used to investigate the effect of counseling in reducing anxiety and improving low self-esteem in nursing students.

2.2 Subjects

The study was conducted on first-year baccalaureate nursing students who were recruited on convenient sampling during the first term of academic year 2012/2013. After pretest sample for self-esteem measurements consisted of 62 students from a potential of 116 participants from first year students' nurse (71.92% response rate)

2.3 Research setting

This study was carried out at the Faculty of Nursing, Minofya University.

2.4 Tools for data collection

Based on review of relevant literature, developed questionnaire was designed by the researchers to assess factors affecting levels of anxiety and self-esteem such as: items related to joining of faculty, staff members feedback, collage adaptation, nursing profession satisfaction, life university satisfaction, shaming for joining of nursing college, and people opinion for you as student nurse.

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES)^[9] which was a self-report measure of global self-esteem studied in both high school students and adult population. The scale is a ten-item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale – each with options of “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), “disagree” (D) and “strongly disagree” (SD). Five items are positive statements (items- 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7) and five are negative (items- 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10). Each option is scored from 0-3 for SD to SA respectively and negative items are reverse scored. The factor-1 score of sum of positive statements were termed as self-enhancement and the factor-2 score of negative statements as self-derogation. The scale total score ranges from 0-30. Scores above 25 indicate high self-esteem, scores between 15 and 25 are for normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The scale was previously used in nursing students by many authors.^[9,13,14]

Anxiety scale: Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) was one of the first rating scales developed to measure the severity of anxiety symptoms, and is still widely used today in both clinical and research settings. The scale consists of 14 items, each defined by a series of symptoms, and measures both psychic anxiety (mental agitation and psychological distress) and somatic anxiety (physical complaints related to anxiety). Each item is scored on a scale of 0 (not present) to 4 (severe), with a total score range of 0-56, where 17 indicates mild severity, 18-24 mild to moderate severity and 25-30 moderate to severe.

The previous 2 tools were translated into Arabic then back translation was done into English to ensure translation accuracy.

2.5 Ethical consideration

After explaining the purpose of the study, a written approval was obtained by the researchers from responsible authorities. The researchers introduced themselves to every participant and explain the purpose of the study and assured them that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study. Also, the researchers emphasized that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and withdrawal from it can be done at any time, then an informed consent was obtained from participants who accepted to participate in the study.

2.6 Validity and reliability

The developed questionnaires tools were reviewed by 5 panels of experts' Psychiatric nursing field in order to ensure content comprehensiveness, clarity, relevance, and applicability. The test-retest reliability showed a value of 0.87. The questionnaires were translated from English into Arabic to help the patient understand them, and then back translation was done into English to ensure translation accuracy.

2.7 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted on ten percent from the total sample size (6 students) prior to the actual study to test feasibility and applicability of the tools and then necessary modifications were carried out accordingly. Data obtained from the pilot study were not included in the current study.

2.8 Procedure

Official written permissions to conduct this study were obtained from the head of Faculty of Nursing. The purpose and nature of the study were explained, and the students were informed that participation or withdrawn was voluntary. This study was conducted according to the following steps: 1st step: Designing the counseling to be implemented through review of related literature and research results regarding the self-esteem and anxiety intervention. It was written in a simple Arabic language and supplemented by illustrations to help the students understand of the content.

Also, study tools were tested for content validity by 5 panels of experts' Psychiatric nursing field in order to ensure content comprehensiveness, clarity, relevance and applicability. 2nd step: the researcher met with the selected students from previous settings. At the initial session, data were collected on sociodemographic data pertinent to factors affecting levels of anxiety and self-esteem such as: items related to joining of faculty, staff members feedback, collage adaptation, nursing profession satisfaction, life university satisfaction, shaming for joining of nursing college, people opinion by you as student nurse. Also pre test Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale were assessed for every subject before exposure to the self-esteem and anxiety intervention. Data were collected during 3 months from September 2012 to December 2012. 3rd step: the counseling sessions were given to selected students who had low self-esteem and had anxiety. The subjects of the study were divided into small groups of 10-11 students. The subjects were exposed to counseling sessions which were 2 sessions per day and 3 days per week (6 consecutive sessions per week) over ten weeks. Each session lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. The first session was designed to equipped subjects with necessary basic information related to self-esteem, definition of

self-esteem, types (high-low), expected reasons and signs of low self-esteem, and how to improve the self-esteem through counseling tips such as: finding out what student wants and what she is good at, value and take actions designed to fulfill her potential goals. Session about respecting student for deep needs will increase her sense of worth and well-being, also session about establish goals on the basis of what student can realistically achieve, and then work step-by-step to develop her potential goals, session about stopping student listening to her “cruel inner critic”, replace such thoughts with self-accepting thoughts, balanced self assessment and self supportive direction. Before sixth session, the researchers made second assessment to measure improving of self-esteem. Another session about separating her emotional reactions—her fears and bad feelings—from the reality of her current situation. Session about taking her chances to expect to make mistakes as part of the process and feel good about trying something new, making progress and increasing her competence, session about learning solve problems, learn student not to avoid problems, face them, and identify ways to solve or cope with them, session about learning the student to practice, make and implement positive decisions flexibly but firmly, and trust herself to deal with the consequences which increase her self-confidence, and another session about developing student skills, learning and practicing those skills that are needed. After completeness of sessions, final assessment is made to measure improving of self-esteem level. Anxiety management is parallel to counseling sessions of self-esteem which was an effective. Explain the following to the students: definition, expected reasons, signs and symptoms of anxiety and ways of anxiety management parallel to the first 2 sessions of self-esteem. Every student takes pamphlet of all types of anxiety management and selects suitable type or types to her. Then with the followed sessions, every student practices the preferred type of it. One is deep breathing exercise. Second is progressive muscle relaxation. Third is visualization or guided imagery. Fourth, mindfulness of thinking and finally, meditation technique. All the students had a home assignment to practice the preferred technique.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 revealed that almost half of studied sample (44.8%) entered the faculty of nursing according to their grades in secondary school. More than two thirds of them (69%) had no satisfaction to join to this faculty. Also, 65.5% of them had negative view toward this faculty.

Table 2 showed that more of half of students had no and border line self-esteem level and above half of studied sample

had anxiety levels (mild, moderate and severe).

Table 3 illustrated that there were a highly significant difference regarding the self-esteem levels before and after counseling sessions.

Table 4 showed that there was significant difference regarding the level of anxiety. The level decreased among the studied sample.

Table 1. Factors affecting level of anxiety & self esteem

Variable	Studied sample N = 116	
	No.	%
-Faculty joining		
Satisfaction	28	24.8
Organizational office (Tansik)	52	44.8
Obligatory	34	29.3
For work	2	1.7
-Staff members feedback		
Good	62	53.4
Bad	50	43.1
Sometimes	4	3.4
-College adaptation		
Yes	110	94.8
No	6	5.2
-Nursing Satisfaction		
Yes	36	31
No	80	69
-Life university satisfaction		
Yes	14	12.1
No	102	87.9
-Shaming for catching of nursing college		
Yes	44	37.9
No	72	62.1
-People opinion for you as student nurse		
Positive	40	34.5
Negative	76	65.5

Table 2. Distribution of self esteem and anxiety levels among studied sample

Variable	Studied sample = 116	
	No.	%
-Levels of self-esteem		
Have self esteem	54	46.6
Border line	46	39.7
No self esteem	16	13.8
-Levels of anxiety		
None	54	46.6
Mild	38	32.8
Moderate	20	17.2
Severe	4	3.4

Table 3. Distribution of the studied samples self esteem after 5 sessions and 10 sessions intervention (N = 62)

Self-esteem levels	Studied		Sample		χ^2
	After 5 sessions		After 10 sessions		
	No	%	No	%	
Low self esteem	16	25.8	-	-	14.516 P: .000
Border line	46	74.2	9	14.5	
Have self esteem	-	-	53	85.5	
Mean	2.258		1.45		
St. d	0.441		0.35514		
Paired <i>t</i> test	27.465				
<i>P</i>	.0000				

Table 4. Distribution of the studied sample for anxiety level after 5 sessions and 10 sessions intervention (N = 62)

Anxiety levels	After 5 sessions		After 10 sessions	
	No	%	No	%
None	21	17.9	58	93.5
Mild	34	29.1	4	6.5
Moderate	6	5.1	-	-
Severe	-	-	-	-
Mean	1.7541		1.0541	
St. d	0.623		0.227	
Paired <i>t</i> test	10.078			
<i>p</i>	.0000			

4. DISCUSSION

Anxiety and low self-esteem go hand-in-hand. Low self-esteem leaves students vulnerable to anxiety. Anxiety butters self-esteem.^[15] There is evidence that self-esteem is related to anxiety and depression. Low self-esteem was effective at raising the risk of anxiety as it decreasing self-esteem.^[16] Every one experiences some anxiety. It is a normal response to a stressful event or received threat. Anxiety can range from feeling uneasy and worried to severe panic. Anxiety is an feeling of apprehension, an easiness, or perceived threat whose source is not known.^[17] Undergraduate university students are the guarantee of our future.^[18] Self-esteem can be defined as the extent to which we deem our value, worth and competence as a person. It factors significantly in how we view our selves and the manner in which we progress through life. Hence, low self-esteem is described as a negative view of one's perceived value, worthiness, and competency.^[5] Adolescents experience low self-esteem ranging from ordinary to severe. Long term exposure may lead to mental disorders, smoking, drug and sexual behavior abuse.^[19] Developing self-esteem is important for nursing students, particularly when caring for people whose situations are uncertain and prognoses are unclear. So, it is important for nursing students to be calm, decisive and reassuring. The nursing school years are an important of transition from adolescents to trained nurses.^[20]

The results of present study revealed that all the participants were females. This result was congruent with the results of Chaves *et al.*^[10] who reported that nursing has been a predominantly female profession since its appearance and they started higher education course before committing to marriage. On the same line, Chunping *et al.*^[20] stated that all the participants were females (100%). The results illustrated that about half of the subjects (45%) entered the faculty of nursing based on the secondary school marks. In Egyptian universities, student may rank choices for collage education, with nursing as a first, second or last choice. This arbitrary acceptance into a discipline that the applicant may not have prioritized could potentially allow an applicant into nursing without a keen desire to become a nurse, but rather to obtain a collage education. According to Safadi *et al.*^[3] admission to nursing programmes in Jordan is competitive and based on high school grades. This is likely to differ from some nursing school in the west that require, in addition to scholastic admission criteria, interviews and statements of interest when school grades are inconclusive for admission in the programme, on the other hand Gemeay *et al.*^[15] stated that 67% of students study nursing because of their interest, while 20% of subjects study nursing because of their marks in secondary school. Ahmedenjad *et al.*^[11] reported that nursing is not the course that applicants are interested in and many of them have no firsthand knowledge of the profession.

On the other hand, the data of Karadag *et al.*^[6] for first year students showed that third quarter (77.6%) were happy to have chosen nursing but significant nearly a quarter were not.

The present study revealed that about the third of studied sample was satisfied for entering nursing profession and two thirds of them indicated that people had negative view towards the nursing profession. The image of nursing as a profession is vital in the successful recruitment and retention of staff in the health care industry.^[1,21] Nursing students' perceptions of nursing might have impact on their self-esteem recruitment, retention, and performance.^[7] This was on the same line of the results of Chaves *et al.*^[10] who reported that more than half of nursing students are not motivated to choose the nursing course that is because they did not manage to be admitted into other courses. Also, the study by Smyth^[22,23] on career intent of nursing students, which reported that nursing was not the first choice. Mclanghlin *et al.*^[24] and Salamonson *et al.*^[8] reported that wise career decisions are based on a clear understanding of one's abilities, interests, ambitions and limitations, as well as knowledge of the chosen career. In a contradictory study, it seems likely those students who select nursing as their first choice because of career aspirations to be nurse will be likely to the study of Williams^[25] who indicated that nursing is the first choice upon 83% of his studied sample. Also, Jose (2014) indicated that 81% of the studied sample was proud for entering nursing career, but, 3% of them were shy. The study Al Jarrah^[1] revealed that highest percentage of study subjects Joined the faculty of nursing because of financial reasons and availability of work.

Regarding the level of self esteem, the current results showed that about half of the studied participants had no self-esteem. This result may due to learning new information and skills dealing with challenging situations can be all negatively impacted by lack of self-esteem. Disempowering experiences can lead to fragile levels of self-esteem which can lead to leaving the nursing program. Increased self-esteem is related to improved motivation for learning and better outlook on a situation. In the same context, Porter *et al.*^[26] reported that the transition of students from secondary school to higher education represents a stressful experience because of new conditions such as making new friends, dealing with different educational environments, or moving away from home. The present study results was congruent with results of Chris *et al.*^[27] who illustrated that total score of Rosenberg self-esteem scale was 14.25 ± 2.12 indicating that self-esteem levels were low. 23 (52.3%) students had low self-esteem and 21 (47.7%) students reported normal self-esteem.

However, on the other hand, Chaves *et al.*^[10] stated that 68.3% of nursing students had high self-esteem level. Nursing students have high self-esteem because they feel that their professions are rewarding and to help others Al Jarrah.^[1] The findings of Edwards *et al.*^[28] indicated that the perceptions of own self-esteem in undergraduate nurses in the UK and in Thailand were comparable to the normal ranges self-esteem. This result was in agreement with result of Edards *et al.*^[29] who indicated that the mean scores of the nursing sample fell within normal levels for all three components of self-esteem.

Regarding the anxiety level, the present study indicated that less than the quarter of studied sample had moderate anxiety level and third quarters had mild anxiety. Many sources of anxiety, has been reported by nursing students such as academic include examination, long hours of study, assignments and grades, lack of free time, faculty response to student need and potential exposure to clinical training. We think that the work load of the students after leaving the secondary school and entering the university world was increasing. In accordance with our results, significantly more stress symptoms were found in the studied sample of Papazisis *et al.*^[4] who found that most of nursing students in mild level and about 12.4% reported high level of anxiety.

Sowislo^[16] believed that interventions aimed at decreasing anxiety should focus on increasing self-esteem. She believed that counseling services should be made available to nursing students. Nearly 60% of the students felt counseling would help them.^[30]

The present study indicated that the significant difference was found between before and after counseling regarding level of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the most researched topic in psychology and counseling. Early and more recent theorists have suggested that self-esteem is a dynamic, changing construct. To increase self-esteem one must either increase one's successes or lower one's expectations. Study of white and Begloy^[31] explored that student's self-esteem rose by the end of their educational program. Sang *et al.*^[32] revealed in their study that the experimental group's self-esteem improved after the program compared to the control group. This was in agreement with the results of Kim and Kim^[33] who indicated that fresh women in a women's university had a higher level of self-esteem after participation in a self-esteem improvement program. This also confirms to the results of Kim and Kim^[34] who reported that a counseling program enhanced the self-esteem of nursing students. Eom and Choi's^[35] study suggested that a group counseling program was also effective in increasing self-esteem. The effectiveness of the counseling program was determined by changes in pre and post

counseling questionnaire scores.

The scores of anxiety had a tendency to decline completing the counseling. Results of Sharif and Arimtiage^[22] indicated that from pre-to-post- test there was no statistically significant reduction in anxiety between study and control groups, but there was a statistically significant reduction in anxiety after psychological counseling. Also, student self-esteem was increased significantly from pre-to-post-test: the implementation of an intervention program reduced their anxiety, increased their self-esteem levels. Johansson^[36] and Ratanasiripong^[12] reported that posttest analysis indicated that the experimental group had significantly lower anxiety and depression than the control group.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study suggested that nursing students experience different levels of anxiety and self-esteem and that these factors are positively correlated. There was improvement of the levels of self-esteem and anxiety. Verbal feedback from the participants during the final session was that the counseling was helpful for them and that they would like to see it continue. So, the faculties of nursing can promote counseling programs via conferences, seminars and new training courses. Further studies are required to generalize the results and more programs among different nursing levels are also required .

5.1 Recommendation

These results may help to better understand the phenomena of anxiety, and counseling will go along way in helping students. Understanding of nursing perception can enhance curricular development towards a caring and holistic paradigm of nursing. Some studies suggest that a positive image of nursing may attract applicants. Conversely, a poor public image of nursing contributes to inadequate number of students entering the nursing education program. Services orientation remains a key factor in choosing nursing. So, the media is considered as a powerful force through which people can find information quickly; it is accessible anywhere, even on a mobile.

5.2 Limitation

This study was conducted on the first year only. So, the ability to generalize the results of the present study to a larger population has to be considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge Faculty of Nursing to support and give permission to conduct this study. Our gratitude is extended to the first nursing students who participated in this study and to every person who helps the authors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest statement.

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