

# Research Progress on Psychological Stress of Nursing Students During Internship

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the psychological stress faced by nursing students during their internships and its relationship with self-efficacy and mental health. Through a literature review and survey analysis, it was found that nursing students generally experience high levels of stress, primarily stemming from work tasks, time management, and interpersonal relationships. Research indicates that students with higher self-efficacy are better able to cope with stress, maintain a positive mindset, and reduce negative emotions. There is a significant relationship between stressors and mental health, as excessive stress may lead to anxiety and fatigue, especially in the later stages of internships. Enhancing self-efficacy and reducing stressors can effectively improve mental health and learning outcomes. Therefore, attention should be given to the psychological well-being of nursing interns, and appropriate interventions should be provided.

**Keywords:** nursing interns, stressors, self-efficacy, mental health status

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of society, the mental health issues of university students in China have received increasing attention[1]. Scholars in the fields of nursing and psychology have conducted extensive research on this issue. Studies in China indicate[2] that medical interns experience curiosity during the first week of clinical practice but also encounter numerous psychological challenges. These issues improve over time as confidence increases. However, during the mid-internship period, psychological problems such as depression, gloom, and anxiety persist, reaching moderate or higher levels. In the later stages of the internship, as students face employment and work pressures, they continue to experience depressive and anxious symptoms. Currently, there is a lack of literature evaluating the psychological status of medical students during internships. Such issues are particularly prominent in the early stages of clinical practice, with anxiety and depression being common. Although students from different medical disciplines experience varying degrees of psychological distress, the differences between disciplines are not significant.

Compared with China, foreign research on the mental health of nurses began earlier. Studies have shown[3] that nurses undertake considerable stress in clinical work, leading to psychological health issues such as anxiety, sleep disorders, eye fatigue, emotional instability, irritability, and somatic symptoms[4]. Surveys indicate that Korean nurses exhibit low job satisfaction, general life satisfaction, and high levels of fatigue. Kilfedder et al. found that among 510 psychiatric nurses in the UK, many exhibited emotional exhaustion, low job satisfaction, and apathy towards work. Portela concluded that clinical nurses lacked leisure time and sleep, and that their demanding work environments severely impacted their physical and mental health. Farrell's 2002 survey of 6,326 Australian clinical nurses revealed that they were prone to verbal and physical abuse, with 63.5% reporting incidents in the past four weeks. Blanco et al. found that clinical nurses had higher levels of adrenaline secretion, heart rate, and systolic blood pressure than during non-working hours[5]. Studies confirm that stress is prevalent in the nursing profession[6]. Researchers are increasingly concerned about the rising stress levels among nursing students, as excessive stress may reduce motivation for independent learning and exploration while negatively impacting their physical and mental well-being[7].

## 2. Sources of stress

Stress refers to the body's tension-related, nonspecific physiological responses, also known as stress reactions, which result from internal and external environmental influences[8]. Under continuous changes in internal and external environments, individuals experience varying degrees of stress. While moderate stress keeps individuals alert and can enhance performance, excessive or prolonged stress leads to mental and physical imbalances, potentially causing various

health issues[9].

According to the literature[10], nursing students experience stress primarily from clinical and academic aspects. They are more sensitive to stress related to clinical nursing work, with psychological symptoms being more common than physiological ones. Clinical stressors include a lack of professional nursing skills and knowledge, the responsibility of caring for patients in a new environment, workload pressure, facing patient deaths, and fear of making mistakes. Other stressors stem from interpersonal relationships, feelings of helplessness, lack of recognition from nursing staff, being perceived as free labor, insufficient teaching support, and frequent criticism, leading to frustration and distress. These factors become particularly evident in cases of poor communication and strained relationships between students and colleagues. Therefore, clinical nurses should acknowledge the significant stress and risks faced by nursing students and offer them greater support and understanding in practice.

### 3. Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy originated in the 1970s and was introduced by Albert Bandura. It includes emotional states, verbal persuasion from others, vicarious experiences, and personal success experiences[11]. Research indicates that enhancing self-efficacy promotes students' learning interest and engagement while reducing study fatigue[12]. In China, research on self-efficacy is relatively recent but has made significant progress in educational fields. From a mental health perspective, medical students generally exhibit better psychological well-being than students in other disciplines, and educators in medical and nursing fields continue to emphasize self-efficacy. Clinical nursing studies show a strong correlation between nursing students' self-efficacy and job burnout[13]. Moreover, clinical nursing students' self-directed learning abilities are positively correlated with their academic self-efficacy[14]. High self-efficacy enables healthcare professionals to focus on problem-solving when facing challenges, mitigating adverse effects and reducing excessive stress and anxiety. Personality traits and self-efficacy are significantly related, jointly affecting the quality of internship experiences for nursing students[15]. However, existing studies primarily focus on newly recruited nurses or clinical nurses, while research on nursing interns' self-efficacy remains limited.

### 4. Correlation between stressors and mental health

Mental health refers to a state in which psychological functions operate normally and stably, allowing individuals to maintain a positive mindset and appropriate behavior within a given range. This state is conditional, as stressors emerge due to various stimuli that affect psychological, physiological, and cognitive aspects. The body's response to stressors is a self-regulation process, wherein stress dissipates when the stressor is removed. Research[16] has shown a close relationship between mental health and stressors. Prolonged exposure to stressors increases their frequency and severity, leading to a greater number of mental health issues. Given the high-intensity nature of nursing students' work, their mental health status is generally poorer compared to the general population. The study of the relationship between stressors and mental health among medical interns is still in its early stages.

### 5. Conclusion

In summary, existing research has explored aspects such as clinical performance, internship environment, internship stress, and general self-efficacy. Studies have shown that nursing interns demonstrate significant differences in communication, nursing skills, self-management, professional planning, and research abilities. As a fundamental discipline, nursing emphasizes evaluating clinical performance and its influencing factors as a key research focus. Research indicates that the clinical internship environment significantly impacts the effectiveness of nursing students' internships, affecting their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, nursing students often encounter various stressors during clinical practice, primarily related to patient care, clinical teaching, and interactions with nursing staff. Identifying and addressing these stressors is crucial for improving the internship experience and promoting better learning outcomes.

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