



## Stress Management among Nursing Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** The pandemic has changed the health paradigm of the world due to its effects and magnitude. It served as a stressor to people from all walks of life and nursing students are not an exception. Stress management among nursing students of Tarlac State University is critical to managing their stressors in terms of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This study focused on assessing the stress management among nursing students of Tarlac State University during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study used the descriptive method. Questionnaires through google forms were administered. There were 160 respondents of the study comprising the nursing students from levels 1 to 4. The study revealed that stressors classified as physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual are slightly stressful because they were able to cope through the practice of health standards and protocols and coping mechanisms. Among those coping mechanisms were regular physical exercise, eating a balanced diet and deep breathing exercise (physical) diversional activities like reading books and calling a friend (mental), being pessimistic and seeking advice from family and friends (emotional) and attending church services, praying and meditating (spiritual). The said coping mechanisms were slightly practiced because of restrictions during the pandemic such as face-to-face meeting and attending church services. Intervention measures proposed were the creation of the stress management team initiated by Tarlac State University composed of the clinical instructors, professors, nursing students, and peer counselors and intensifying the inclusion of stress management to the nursing curriculum.

**Key Words:** COVID-19; Nursing Education, Coping Mechanisms; Pandemic; Stress; Stress Management;

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 has given the world something to fear and was silenced through the lockdown. It created havoc on the health of the people and was forced to observe and practice health standards and protocols to contain the virus (CDC, 2020).

As of November 17, 2020, there are a total of

410,718 cases in the Philippines and in Central Luzon, there are a total of 25,300 cases of COVID-19. This astonishing number of cases will only skyrocket as time pass by (DOH, 2019).

Due to the current health set-up, changes in society has been experienced by individuals in all aspect of their lives, particularly students. According to Friedman (2020) aside from stress, the switch of



face-to-face to online classes bring up different problems such as distractions and time management, technical issues, understanding the course expectations, lack of in-person interaction, uncertainty about the future, adapting to unfamiliar technology, and staying motivated.

Berger (2016) said that stress is a normal reaction of a human when faced with a situation that they have no idea how to handle. A good example of such situation is the COVID-19 pandemic. Throwing the country into a lockdown, the COVID-19 pandemic managed to bring a “new normal,” making people do things differently from how they used to.

The nursing students has experienced the sudden shift in its learning mode such as synchronous and asynchronous and believe to have caused impact to their lives in the form of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual stresses.

Given the above-mentioned situations, the researchers were prompted to conduct the research to determine the stressors and how it was being managed by the nursing students using coping mechanisms. Although stress is inevitable, the stress brought by the pandemic is somewhat different from the stress that is present prior to the lockdown due to the pandemic. The study allows the researchers to view what new forms of stress are experienced by the nursing students, as well as what coping mechanisms or techniques were used to alleviate the stressors they are experiencing during the pandemic.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study assessed the stress management practices among the Nursing students of Tarlac State University during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profile of the respondents?
  - 1.1 Gender
  - 1.2 Year Level
  - 1.3 Religion
2. How are the level of stress among the Nursing students of Tarlac State University

during the COVID-19 Pandemic described?

3. How do the Nursing students manage their stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What interventions could be proposed to enhance the stress management skills of the Nursing students?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study will be beneficial to the following:

**For the Educational Institutions (Colleges and Universities),** this study will provide a deeper perspective of the stress encountered by the nursing students of Tarlac State University during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the coping mechanisms they used to manage their stress. This enables educational institutions to make wide scale programs and action plans that would promote a healthier life for the students in their institutions not only during pandemic but also even during their daily routines as health services providers.

**For the Administrators of Tarlac State University,** this study will serve as basis and support to create programs, projects and activities that would be beneficial for the students to manage their stress not only during a pandemic but also during their daily routines as health services providers

**For the Clinical Instructors,** this study will aid them to develop policies, programs and projects geared toward the advocacy campaign on managing stress in the institution.

**For the Students,** who will benefit from the results of this study, they will be informed on the stressors and their management. It will give them a better perspective on how to manage them using the coping mechanisms that are beneficial to them.

**For the Parents,** this study will give them a better picture of the stressors experienced by their children especially those who are taking up Nursing. Awareness will aid a better understanding of their stressors and help them in addressing them with full

support and assistance.

**For the Future Researchers**, this study will serve as reference to further deepen a study on stress management among Nursing students.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study used the quantitative-descriptive research design in assessing the stress management practices of the Nursing students during COVID-19 Pandemic.

The respondents of the study were the Level 1 to Level 3 Nursing students of Tarlac State University. A total of 160 students qualified to participate in the study. Using Slovin's Formula with 0.07 margin of error, the researchers were able to compute for a sample size of 160 respondents. The random sampling technique was used to determine the samples from the College of Science - Department of Nursing, Tarlac State University.

**Formula:** 
$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

$$n = \frac{734}{1+(734)(0.07)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{734}{4.60} = 160$$

Year Level	# of Students	Percentage	Number of Students per Level
1 <sup>st</sup> year	380	51.8%	83
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	198	27%	43
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	154	21%	34
4 <sup>th</sup> year	2	0.2%	N/A
Total	N= 734	100%	n= 160

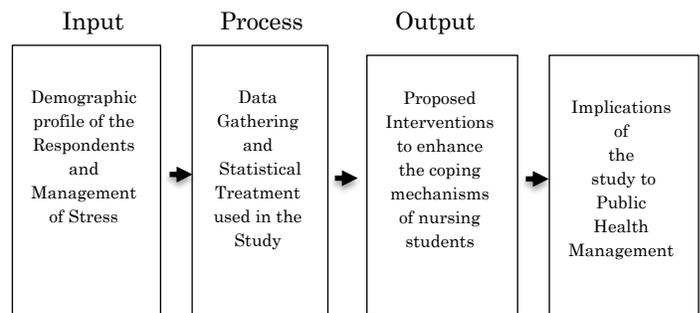
The major instrument of the study was the self-made questionnaire. Google forms were used to collect the data needed in the study. In structuring the questionnaire, the researchers used the dimensions of wellness which includes the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. The questionnaire was validated through experts and interview and focus group discussion through messenger were used to cross check the data gathered.

Ethical considerations were observed during the conduct of the study. Data privacy and confidentiality were strictly enforced during the start and completion of the study. The study covered the School Year 2020-2021.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study used the Input-Process-Output where the demographic profile and the stressors served as the input.

Data gathering and statistical treatment used were the processes used in the study while the outputs were the determination of the demographic profile and stressors of the respondents and propose interventions to enhance the coping mechanisms in stress management.



## DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers used the Likert Scale that helped the respondents fully understand the questions being asked

Table 1  
Likert Scale for Stressors

Index	Range	Descriptive Rating
3	2.50-3.00	Highly Stressful
2	1.50-2.49	Slightly Stressful
1	1.00-1.49	Not Stressful

Table 2  
Likert Scale for Stress Management

Index	Range	Descriptive Rating
3	2.50-3.00	Highly practiced
2	1.50-2.49	Slightly practiced
1	1.00-1.49	Not practiced

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Demographic Profile of the Nursing Students

The demographic profile of the respondents is gender, year level and religion.

#### 1.1 Gender

The result shows that the gender of Nursing students in Tarlac State University was dominated by females. It signifies that Nursing is a female profession.



### 1.2 Year Level

The result shows that most of the students enrolled were first year Nursing students followed by the second year and third year. The enrollment of Nursing shows that level 1 has 380 students while level 2, 3 and 4 are 198, 154 and 2 respectively. The result signifies that there is an increasing number of post-secondary education students who are pursuing a Nursing course.

### 1.3 Religion

The result shows that most of the religion of Nursing Students of Tarlac State University is Roman Catholic. Of the 160 respondents, 109 are Roman Catholic and signifies their strong faith in God.

## 2. Stressors among the Nursing Students

Stressors experienced by nursing students were categorized as physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

### 2.1 Physical

Physical stressors experienced by nursing students were weak immune system, post co-morbidity, exposure to COVID-19 positive and having symptoms of COVID-19. The overall average weighted mean was 2.17 (slightly stressful). According to the nursing students, the physical stressors were considered slightly stressful because it does not have any harmful effects to their physical well-being. Furthermore, nursing students followed the guidelines of safety health protocols and restricted face to face classes to facilitate their safety.

### 2.2 Mental

The mental stressors experienced by the nursing students were having depressive thoughts and fear of being exposed to COVID-19, feelings of isolation, rejection from other people and loss of a loved one with overall average

weighted mean of 2.10 (slightly stressful). According to the nursing students, the said stressors were considered as slightly stressful because they believed that being optimistic, they can surpass this challenge confidently through the coping mechanisms they used.

### 2.3 Emotional

The emotional stressors experienced by nursing students were fear of family member to be infected with COVID-19, overthinking about the future from COVID-19 and lack of support family and friends with the overall average weighted mean of 2.60 (highly stressful). According to the nursing students, their emotional stressors were considered as highly stressful because of the fear of COVID-19 equate to their weak emotional capabilities which makes them vulnerable in facing this pandemic without having anyone to support them emotionally.

### 2.4 Spiritual

The spiritual stressors experienced by nursing students were lack of hope arising from the pandemic situation, having a feeling of being abandoned by God and faith is compromised due to hopelessness with the overall weighted mean of 1.93 (slightly stressful). According to the nursing students, the spiritual stressors slightly affected them because of their strong faith to God.

## 3. Stress Management of Nursing Students

Stress management is the technique used by the nursing students to manage and cope with stressors they encountered during covid-19 Pandemic.

### 3.1 Physical

The nursing students manage their stress physically through regular physical exercise, eating a balanced diet, adequate sleep, vitamins to boost immune system and deep breathing exercise with the overall weighted mean of 2.12



slightly practiced. According to the nursing students, they should successfully use the said coping mechanisms to remain physically healthy with or without pandemic; however, they cannot practice or do it wholeheartedly due to pandemic restrictions and limitations such as restrictions to go out and fear of being infected with COVID-19.

### **3.2 Mental**

The nursing students managed their stress mentally through reading books, answering puzzles, taking a nap and calling a friend with the overall average weighted mean of 2.34 (slightly practiced). According to the nursing students, managing their stress mentally during the COVID-19 pandemic was helpful to their mental health. However, they still fail to practice all the time because their minds were slightly pre-occupied by COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.3 Emotional**

The nursing students managed their stress emotionally by building a support system with the family and friends seeking advice from family and friends, being optimistic and accepting things they cannot change with overall average weighted mean was 2.37 (slightly practiced). According to the nursing students, managing emotional stress is a must during pandemic or not. However, it was not successfully done because of the prohibition of face to face meeting with friends and classmates which could help them more on the mental problems they are experiencing.

### **3.4 Spiritual**

Managing stress spiritually through attending church services, praying, meditating, reading the Bible and writing a journal for reflection with the overall average weighted mean was 2.44 (slightly practiced). According to the nursing students, managing their stress spiritually during the pandemic COVID-19 Pandemic is helpful to relieve anxieties; however, limitations during pandemic did not allow them to do some activities like going to church.

## **4. Interventions to enhance the Stress Management of the Nursing Students**

The creation of a stress management team initiated by Tarlac State University and will be composed of clinical instructors, professors, Nursing students, and peers. Counselors to help Nursing students cope up and enhance stress management techniques were the interventions proposed. In addition, intensification of the inclusion of stress management into the Nursing curriculum and advocacy campaign on stress and its management.

## **5. Implications to Public Health Management**

The determination of stressors is imperative in determining the management and the coping mechanisms that will be used, especially in this time of COVID-19 pandemic. The proper management of stress and stressors will give a positive impact to public health management such as less number or decreasing cases of illness or sickness that may result from stress, thereby saving funds which could be allotted on the health care management of the citizens.

## **4.CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the results and discussion, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Female nursing students are more dominant than male while there are more level 1 students compared to other levels. Nursing is a female - dominated profession. Roman Catholics dominate the Nursing course.
2. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual stressors were slightly stressful because nursing students were able to cope up through practicing health standards and protocol, being pessimistic, believing in themselves and God despite the COVID -19 restrictions.
3. Stress was slightly managed because of the restrictions and limitations during the



COVID-19 pandemic. Among the coping mechanisms were regular physical exercise, eating a balanced diet, and deep breathing exercise (physical) diversional activities like reading books and calling a friend (mental), being pessimistic and seeking advice from friends (emotional) and praying and meditating (spiritual). The said coping mechanisms were slightly practiced because of restrictions during pandemic.

4. Intervention measures proposed were creation of a stress management team initiated by the nursing department and will be headed by the dean and composed of clinical instructors, professors, nursing students and peer counselors, intensify the inclusion of stress and its management, continuous advocacy on stress management.
5. The determination of stressors is a must in determining the management and the coping mechanisms to be used especially in this time of COVID-19 pandemic. The proper management of stress and stressors will give a positive impact on public health management such as less number or decreasing cases of illness or sickness that may result from stress, thereby saving funds which could be allotted on the health care management of the citizens.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Intensify the advocacy on stress management in the university particularly in the nursing department through webinars, conferences and trainings.
2. Encourage the students to strengthen their faith through daily devotion and meditation to help them cope up their stress during pandemic.
3. Encourage the students to practice diversional activities such as answering puzzles to improve their problem-solving abilities and divert their attention from stressful situations.

4. Create a stress management team in the Nursing Department.
5. Create a team of peer counselors headed by the Nursing student leaders who will help in better understanding the students' stress.
6. Encourage the inclusion of stress management in the Nursing curriculum that will help the students cope with stress not only during pandemic but also during their daily routines as health care service providers.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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