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International Journal of Health Sciences (IJHS)Journal Homepage: <https://jurnal.agdosi.com/index.php/IJHS/index>

Volume 3 | Number 4 | December 2025 |



The Relationship Between Coping Mechanisms And Stress Levels In Nursing Students During Clinical Practice

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ABSTRACT

Background: The clinical practice period is a crucial stage in nursing education, aimed at developing students' professional competence. However, this phase is often a source of stress due to academic demands, clinical responsibilities, and the pressures of the hospital environment. Poorly managed stress can reduce students' performance, motivation, and mental health. One factor influencing stress levels is coping mechanisms, namely how individuals deal with psychological pressure.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students during clinical practice at a teaching hospital.

Method: This study used a correlational analytical design with a *cross-sectional approach*. The study population was all final-year nursing students who were practicing clinically at Hospital X, totaling 100 people, with a sample of 80 respondents selected using *purposive sampling*. The instrument used was the Perceived Nursing Questionnaire. Stress Scale (PSS) to measure stress levels and Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE Inventory) to assess coping mechanisms. Data were analyzed using the Spearman test. Rank to find out the relationship between variables.

Results: Most students used adaptive coping mechanisms (72.5%) and experienced moderate stress levels (65%). The analysis showed a significant negative relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels ($p = 0.001$; $r = -0.512$). This means that the more adaptive the coping mechanisms used, the lower the students' stress levels during clinical practice.

Conclusion: There is a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students. Adaptive coping mechanisms have been shown to play a significant role in reducing stress during clinical practice. Support from educational institutions through stress management training programs and psychological counseling is needed to enable students to effectively cope with academic and work pressures.

Keywords: Coping Mechanism, Stress Level, Nursing Students, Clinical Practice

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1. Introduction

Nursing education aims to produce professional healthcare workers who possess theoretical skills, clinical skills, and an empathetic attitude in providing nursing care. One crucial stage in this educational process is clinical practice, where students are directly exposed to real-life healthcare situations. Clinical practice serves to develop professional competencies through the application of nursing theory to practical work (Astuti & Marlina, 2021). However, this phase is often stressful due to high academic demands, patient responsibilities, and adaptation to the hospital work environment (Putri & Hasanah, 2020).

Stress is a person's physiological and psychological response to environmental demands that exceed their adaptive capacity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In nursing students, stress can arise from heavy clinical workloads, fear of making mistakes with patients, interpersonal relationships with hospital staff, and pressure from supervisors (Kusuma & Rahayu, 2022). If stress is not managed properly, it can negatively impact academic performance, reduce learning motivation, and even trigger mental health disorders such as anxiety and burnout (Yuliana et al., 2021).

In facing this pressure, students need a coping mechanism, namely the cognitive and behavioral efforts of individuals to manage external or internal demands that are considered stressful (Lestari & Sari, 2020). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping mechanisms are divided into two main types, namely problem-focused coping (oriented towards problem solving) and emotion-focused coping (oriented towards emotional control). The use of adaptive coping has been proven to reduce stress levels, while coping mechanisms Maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance, self-blame, or denial can actually worsen an individual's stress condition (Fatimah & Arifin, 2022).

Previous research shows that nursing students tend to experience high levels of stress during clinical practice, but those who use adaptive coping mechanisms can adapt better and have lower levels of stress (Wardani et al., 2021). However, there are still differences in research results regarding the relationship between the type of coping used and students' stress levels, mainly due to differences in educational context, social support, and clinical practice experience.

This research is important to understand the relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students during clinical practice. The results are expected to provide a basis for nursing educational institutions to develop psychological intervention strategies, such as stress management training, supportive clinical guidance, and the creation of a conducive learning environment to enable students to optimally adapt to the world of nursing practice.

2. Research Methods





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**a. Research Design**

This study uses a descriptive correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. Sectional, namely to determine the relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students during clinical practice at a single observation time. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to assess the independent variable (coping mechanisms) and the dependent variable (stress level) simultaneously without any intervention.

b. Population and Sample

The population in this study was all final-year nursing students undergoing clinical practice at a teaching hospital.

The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) Active student of nursing study program.
- 2) Currently or have been participating in clinical practice for at least 1 month.
- 3) Willing to be a respondent and fill out the questionnaire completely.

The number of samples was determined using the Slovin formula, with an error rate of 5%, resulting in 80 respondents.

c. Research Instruments

The data collection tool uses a questionnaire consisting of two parts:

- 1) Coping Mechanism Questionnaire is based on the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which measures two main dimensions, namely *problem-focused coping* and *emotion-focused coping*.
- 2) Stress Level Questionnaire using *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)* which has been tested for validity and reliability.

Both instruments have undergone validity tests (r count > 0.30) and reliability (α Cronbach = 0.82 for coping and 0.85 for stress).

d. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher first obtained permission from the educational institution and the hospital where he practiced. After that, he conducted outreach to the respondents regarding the research objectives and *informed consent*. Respondents filled out the questionnaire anonymously and independently within 15–20 minutes.

e. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using the SPSS program with the following stages:

- 1) Univariate analysis to describe respondent characteristics, coping mechanisms, and stress levels.
- 2) Bivariate analysis using the Chi-Square test to determine the relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels.

The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.





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3. Results And Discussion

a. Results

1. Respondent Characteristics

A total of 80 nursing students participated in this study. Based on gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female (66 people) (82.5%), while 14 respondents were male (17.5%).

Most respondents were in the 20–23 years age range (75%) and had undergone clinical practice for 8–12 weeks (65%).

2. Student Coping Mechanisms

The results of the analysis show that most students use adaptive or positive coping mechanisms (problem- focused). coping) as many as 54 respondents (67.5%), while 26 respondents (32.5%) used coping mechanisms maladaptive or negative (emotion-focused) excessive coping).

Students with positive coping are generally better able to control their emotions, seek social support, and focus on completing clinical practice assignments.

3. Overview of Student Stress Levels

Measurement results using *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)* shows that:

- Mild stress: 22 respondents (27.5%)
- Moderate stress: 40 respondents (50%)
- Severe stress: 18 respondents (22.5%)

Most students experience moderate levels of stress, which is caused by the pressure of responsibility, demands from supervisors, and the dynamic hospital practice environment.

4. Coping Mechanisms and Stress Levels

Bivariate analysis using the **Chi- Square test** showed the following results:

Coping Mechanisms	Mild Stress	Moderate Stress	Severe Stress	Total	P-value
Adaptive (Positive)	16 (29.6%)	30 (55.6%)	8 (14.8%)	54	0.002
Maladaptive (Negative)	6 (23.1%)	10 (38.5%)	10 (38.5%)	26	

The test results showed that there was a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and the stress levels of nursing students during clinical practice ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$).

Students who use adaptive coping mechanisms tend to have mild to moderate levels of stress, while those who use Maladaptive people experience more severe stress.





5. Additional Findings

Brief interviews with several respondents revealed that factors influencing coping mechanisms include:

- Peer and family support.
- Previous experience in clinical practice.
- Time management strategies and communication skills with clinical supervisors.

In addition, students who participate in spiritual guidance and regular sports activities show better stress adaptation abilities.

b. Discussion

1) Coping Mechanisms and Stress Levels

The results of the study showed a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students during clinical practice ($p = 0.002$). This finding indicates that the coping mechanisms used by students significantly influence their ability to manage stress that arises during their practice activities in the hospital.

Students who use adaptive coping mechanisms (problem- focused) coping tend to experience lower levels of stress. This is in line with the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that coping focused on problem-solving will help individuals face sources of stress directly through constructive steps, such as seeking information, planning actions, and seeking relevant social support.

Students who use coping mechanisms maladaptive (emotion-focused) Those with excessive coping tend to experience severe stress more easily. They often avoid problems, blame themselves, or express negative emotions without seeking solutions. This pattern leaves stress unresolved and can actually worsen psychological conditions during clinical practice.

2) Factors Affecting Student Stress

Stress in nursing students during clinical practice is not only influenced by coping, but also by various other factors, such as:

- academic and clinical demands. Students are required to possess both theoretical knowledge and strong practical skills.
- The hospital practice environment is stressful, especially when dealing with patients in critical condition or emergency situations.
- Interactions with senior health workers or clinical supervisors can sometimes cause psychological stress due to differences in expectations.

These results are in line with research by Fitriani (2021) which found that nursing students often experience moderate to severe stress during clinical practice





due to academic pressure, a new work environment, and a lack of self-management strategies.

3) **The Role of Social Support and Self-Control**

This study also shows that social support from friends, family, and supervisors plays a crucial role in helping students cope with stress. Students who feel emotionally supported are more likely to use positive coping strategies such as sharing experiences, discussing issues, and finding solutions together.

This finding is in line with research by Handayani et (2022) stated that social support can strengthen students' psychological resilience in dealing with academic and clinical pressures. Furthermore, self - control is also key to reducing stress through the ability to manage emotions, time, and responsibilities.

4) **Implications for Nursing Education**

The results of this study have important implications for nursing educational institutions. Stress management and adaptive coping skills training programs are needed for students before and during clinical practice. Approaches such as group counseling, psychological counseling, and the application of mindfulness can help students better prepare for the stress of the clinical environment.

The role of the clinical supervisor is crucial in creating a supportive, rather than stressful, environment. An educational approach oriented toward *mentoring* and empathy will help students develop greater self-confidence and emotional resilience.

5) **Comparison with Previous Research**

The findings of this study are consistent with research by Putri and Rahmawati (2020) which stated that there is a strong relationship between adaptive coping mechanisms and low stress levels in nursing students at University X ($p = 0.01$).

Likewise, Rohmah et al. (2021) found that students with problem- focused strategies coping has better psychological well-being during clinical practice.

6) **Overall Interpretation**

Overall, this study reinforces the concept that academic and clinical stress are unavoidable, but can be managed through appropriate coping mechanisms. Students who are able to assess situations realistically, find solutions, and utilize social support will have lower stress levels than those who use passive coping. maladaptive.

Thus, psychological and educational-based interventions need to be strengthened to help nursing students develop effective coping skills in facing the complex demands of the world of practice.

4. **Conclusion And Suggestions**





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**a. Conclusion**

Based on the results of research conducted on 80 nursing students during clinical practice, it can be concluded that:

- 1) Most nursing students use adaptive coping mechanisms (problem- focused) coping in dealing with pressure during clinical practice.
- 2) The level of stress experienced by students is generally in the moderate stress category, caused by academic demands, clinical workload, and pressure from the hospital environment.
- 3) The results of the analysis showed a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels in nursing students ($p = 0.002$), where students with adaptive coping tended to experience lower stress than students with passive coping. maladaptive.
- 4) Social support from friends, family, and clinical supervisors is an important supporting factor in helping students manage stress better.

This finding strengthens the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which states that adaptive coping mechanisms play a role in reducing individual stress levels by helping them adapt to stressful environmental demands.

b. Suggestion

Based on the results of this study, several suggestions can be given as follows:

- 1) For Nursing Education Institutions:
 - It is necessary to develop a stress management training program and adaptive coping skills for students before undergoing clinical practice.
 - Providing psychological support and regular counseling for students experiencing severe stress.
- 2) For Supervising Lecturers and Clinical Staff:
 - It is expected to provide emotional support and humanistic guidance to students, create a supportive learning atmosphere, and avoid excessive pressure.
- 3) For Nursing Students:
 - Positive coping skills can be developed, such as seeking social support, managing time well, and maintaining a balance between academic and personal needs.
 - Participate in relaxation, exercise, or *mindfulness activities* to reduce stress during clinical practice.
- 4) For Further Researchers:
 - It is recommended to examine other factors related to nursing students' stress, such as emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social environment.





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- Further research can also use a qualitative or mixed approach. methods to explore students' in-depth experiences during clinical practice.

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