

ABSTRACT

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Title: ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXERCISE AND STRESS IN NURSING STUDENTS

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Stress is a normal response to change and life events. Stress affects all individuals to varying degrees and can be positive, such as eustress, or negative, such as distress (Chipas et al., 2012). Nursing students are constantly under various stressors such as maintaining high GPAs, long clinical hours, weekly exams, irregular meal times, clinical performance evaluation, finances, maintaining patient safety, dealing with pain and death, and upholding expectations from self and others. If these stressors are not managed properly, they can have an effect on the physical and psychological health of nursing students (Sang Dol, 2014). Studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects that physical activity has on health maintenance, longevity, well-being, health-related quality of life, and disease prevention (Blake, McGill, & Stanulewicz, 2017). This descriptive correlational study analyzed the effect of exercise on junior and senior undergraduate baccalaureate nursing students' stress levels. The *College Student Stress Scale* created by PsycTESTS was used to measure how frequently students feel distressed or anxious or question their ability. The second research tool used was the *Cognitive Behavioral Physical Activity Questionnaire* created by PsycTESTS to measure physical activity levels in college students. An educational intervention entitled *Exercise Changed this Neuroscientists Life and Now She Wants to Change Yours* by Dr. Wendy Suzuki, was shown to the participants after they completed the survey. Statistical analysis comparing the responses from junior and senior level nursing students revealed that there was no significant difference in stress levels between nursing students who report regular exercise compared to nursing students who do not exercise on a regular basis. There were several limitations to this study including a small, convenient sample and lack of a posttest. This study should be replicated to include a large and more diverse sample. The addition of a posttest would be helpful in identifying nursing students' willingness to exercise after the educational intervention.