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Level of perceived stress in final-year nursing students due to the COVID-19 pandemic in North Lima

Nivel de estrés percibido en estudiantes del último año de una facultad de enfermería por la pandemia del COVID-19 en Lima Norte

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ABSTRACT

Perceived stress is one of the symptoms that nursing students experience due to stressful situations in their lives and academically. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the level of perceived stress among final-year students at a nursing school due to the COVID-19 pandemic in North Lima. This was a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study with a total population of 60 participants who completed a sociodemographic questionnaire and the Perceived Stress Scale. The results showed that 21,7 % (n=13) had a low level of stress, 58,3 % (n=35) had a medium level of stress, and 20 % (n=12) had a high level of stress. In conclusion, universities should implement strategies to strengthen students' coping skills.

Keywords: Psychological Stress; Nursing Students; Mental Health; Coronavirus.

RESUMEN

El estrés percibido es uno de los síntomas que presenta el estudiante de enfermería en la cual ellos perciben dado a situaciones estresantes en su vida y académica, por ello el objetivo de estudio es determinar el nivel de estrés percibido en estudiantes del último año de una facultad de enfermería por la pandemia del COVID-19 en Lima Norte. Es un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo-transversal, con una población total de 60 participantes que respondieron un cuestionario de aspectos sociodemográficos y el instrumento Escala de Estress Percibido. En sus resultados se observó que, el 21,7 %(n=13) tienen un bajo nivel de estrés, 58,3 % (35) tienen un nivel de estrés medio y 20 %(n=12) un nivel de estrés alto. En conclusión, la universidad debe implementar estrategias que permitan fortalecer las capacidades de afrontamiento en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Estrés psicológico; Estudiantes de enfermería; Salud mental; Coronavirus.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created academic challenges for the education of nursing students, where teaching for knowledge and the development of clinical judgment in the classroom have been compromised.[1,2]

A major change that disrupted education worldwide and led to the implementation of strategies to enable online education,[3] which was associated with anxiety and stress disorders in most students, given that the

interruption of face-to-face classes and the complete halt of their pre-professional internships was unexpected. [4,5]

This is because academic training in nursing is based mainly on clinical practice, which has led to great concern among students, [6,7] as they do not know how long the pandemic will last and when they will return to face-to-face classes so that they can better develop their academic and clinical skills. [8,9]

Nursing students who are unable to carry out their clinical practice experience high levels of stress. [10,11] There are two main factors that contribute to high stress levels: the academic level, where excessive activities, exams, task overload, and spending so much time in virtual classes are indicators that increase stress symptoms; The second factor is the clinical environment. Not being able to carry out their work leads to high levels of stress, as they lack skills related to their profession, are unfamiliar with diagnoses, patient histories, and patient treatment, all of which are indicators that, when not carried out, generate symptoms of stress in students. [12,13,14]

Although high stress levels in nursing students are generally due to daily life and additional academic stress, lack of time to relax, not learning a subject in depth, exams, and competitive environments, this puts a strain on students' mental health, making them vulnerable to stress and, in turn, anxiety. [15,16]

In a study conducted in Iceland with a population of 1 044 nursing students, the results showed that 51 % of participants reported perceived stress and 42 % reported academic exhaustion. The study concluded that stress among students was due to academic and clinical overload. [17]

In a study conducted in Spain with 190 nursing students, the results showed that 47,95 % of participants experienced moderate stress in the early semesters and 52,05 % of participants experienced high stress in the later semesters, concluding that participants in their final year of study had high stress levels. [18]

In a study conducted in Mexico with 250 nursing students, the results showed that 21,2 % of participants had low stress, 78 % had medium stress, and 0,8 % had high stress, concluding that nursing students have high levels of stress due to virtual theoretical courses. [19]

Therefore, the objective of this research is to determine the level of stress perceived by final-year nursing students due to the COVID-19 pandemic in northern Lima.

METHOD
Research type and design
The study is quantitative in nature and uses a descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental methodology. [20]

Population
The population consists of a total of 60 nursing students in their final year of study.

Inclusion Criteria
- Participants who are in their 9th and 10th semesters of study.
- Participants who voluntarily agree to participate in the study

Technique and Instrument
The technique used is a virtual survey, which covers sociodemographic aspects and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) data collection instrument.

The PSS-14 instrument is self-administered to assess how stressed the student is. The scale consists of a unidimensional dimension with 14 questions with 5 response options on a Likert scale where: "0 = never," "1 = almost never," "2 = occasionally," "3 = often," and "4 = very often." In turn, when adding the 14 items, the alternatives in questions 4, 7, 9, 10, and 13 must be reversed, respectively, with the final result ranging from 0 to 56 points, where the higher the score, the greater the stress experienced by the nursing student. [21,22]

Place and Application of the Instrument
First, the students were coordinated remotely to participate in the study by completing the survey online, as it was made available through social media, and they were provided with information about the study to be conducted.

Many nursing students, having received clinical and theoretical training in a different way during the COVID-19 pandemic, perceived that they were experiencing symptoms of stress and anxiety, given that the development of their academic and clinical skills had to be adapted to the situation and that this could create an un r stressful experience for them. Given that their ability to adapt and cope with this situation is a major change that they must maintain in order to keep their mental health stable.

However, students must receive support from their families and the institution where they study in order to improve their coping skills in the face of academic stress, as this will act as a mental protector to prevent or reduce stress, anxiety, or situational depression.
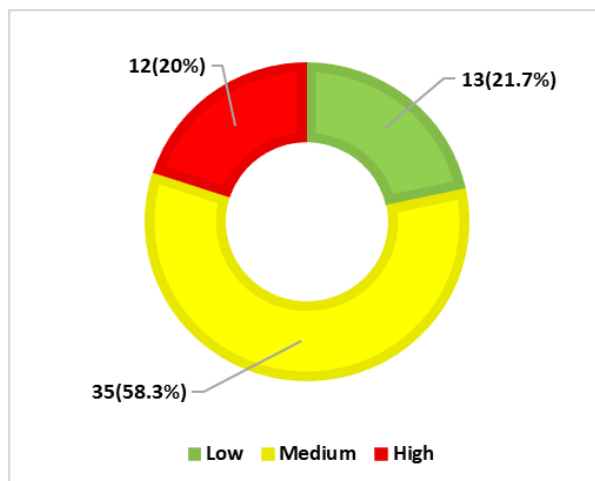
RESULTS

Figure 1. Perceived stress level in final-year nursing students due to the COVID-19 pandemic in northern Lima

In figure 1, we can see that 21,7 % of nursing students have low stress levels, 58,3 % have medium stress levels, and 20 % have high stress levels.
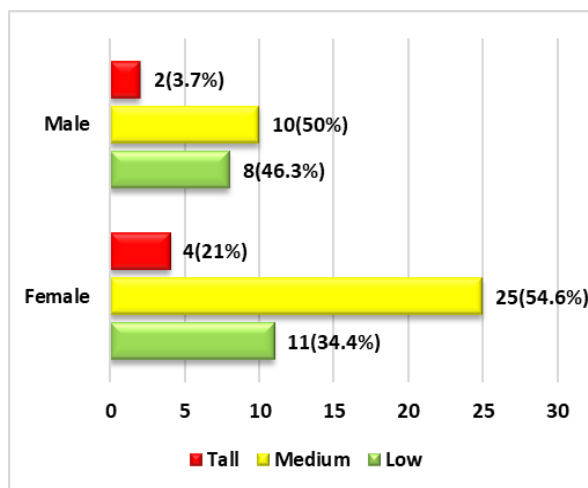

Figure 2. Perceived stress levels in relation to gender in final-year nursing students due to the COVID-19 pandemic in northern Lima

In figure 2, we can see that, in relation to the gender of nursing students, 46,3 % of male participants have low stress levels, 50 % have medium stress levels, and 3,7 % have high stress levels. and among female students, 34,4 % have low stress levels, 54,6 % have medium stress levels, and 21 % have high stress levels.
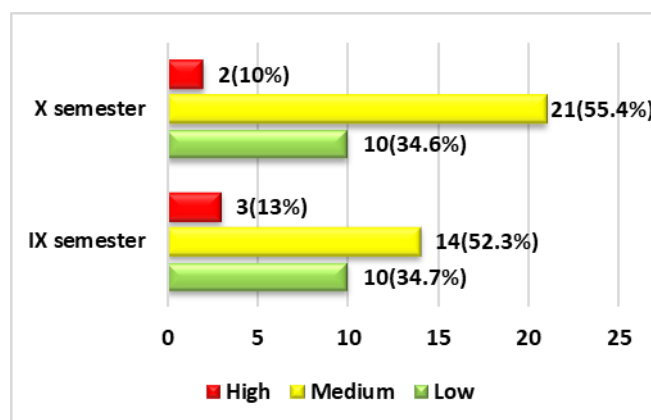

Figure 3. Perceived stress level in relation to the semester of study in final-year nursing students due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Lima

In figure 3, we can see that, in relation to the semester of study of nursing students, in the ninth semester, 34,7 % of participants have a low stress level, 52,3 % have a medium stress level, and 13 % have a high stress level. and in the tenth semester, 34,6 % had high stress levels, 55,5 % had medium stress levels, and 10 % had high stress levels.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted from a mental and community health perspective, given that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many nursing students were affected by the measures taken to prevent the disease, interrupting their practical study activities. Therefore, the study seeks to assess stress in students during the pandemic.

Given that the disease has created an unfavorable and different environment in the clinical setting for nursing students, who felt overwhelmed when they were able to return to their clinical practices and at the same time take their theoretical classes virtually, the insufficient time to carry out activities, attend the course, and ensure that the internet connection did not go down caused stress to a certain extent.

CONCLUSIONS

The university should implement strategies to strengthen students' coping skills. Talks, counseling, and distribution of brochures are important to achieve this. Tutors should seek to identify cases of students in the classroom who warrant more personalized counseling.

This study provides important evidence that should be used to develop educational and health policies that focus on the mental health of university students, specifically those in nursing programs. The university should build on the evidence found and take action through the student wellness area, all with the aim of creating a favorable environment that ensures learning processes and the achievement of academic goals.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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