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**RESEARCH PAPER****Perceived Social Support as A Predictor of Perceived Stress in Nursing Students in Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of present research was to study the predictive association between perceived social support and perceived stress in nursing students in Pakistan. The correlation study was conducted to find if there would be a significant predictive association between perceived social support and perceived stress in student nurses. The sample of 555 nursing students of ages 19-30 years (M= 21.41; SD=2.25) was recruited by using purposive sampling technique. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress Scale were used in Urdu language as research instruments. Descriptive statistics was used for demographic characteristics of the sample, while Regression analysis was used to analyze the predictive link between study variables. Result indicates the statistically significant predictive relationship between PSS and PS in nursing student ( $r=.576, p<0.001$ ). It is recommended that social support may play a crucial role in reducing perceived stress and its adverse impacts on mental health of nursing students.

**KEYWORDS** Pakistan, Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress, Student Nurses

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**Introduction**

Stress and its impacts are indispensable concerns in the life of human-beings in the modern-day society. Stress is recognized as a menace to one's quality of life as well as well-being of both physical and psychological (Cox et al., 2000). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as a state when an individual perceives that "strains from the milieu surpass the individual and societal capitals the individual is able to mobilize". It has been also discussed that stress, itself is not problematic, but the perspicacity of strain is damaging to mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The major forms of stressors investigated throughout the literature are, events of life, steady strains, and everyday troubles (Thoits, 1995). Modest level of stress considered as beneficial in encouraging a person to function well for achievement, however, high level of stress found devastating which consequently led to various health complications of both physical as well as psychological in nature, such as anxiety and depression (Larson, 2006). It also decreased job satisfaction of the employees and leads towards family conflicts (Mushtaq et al., 2024)

Stress has been commonly found among the people who remain under strain and anticipated to sustain canons and meet targets both in terms of goals and deadlines (Towbes & Cohen, 1996), and nursing students are found to be more likely to experience stress as compared to other students. According to Sherina et al. (2004), nursing schools are considered as taxing, which destructively effects the academic presentation, and the wellbeing of the trainees. In nursing mavens, the stress may also have adversative effects on various spheres of life, such as upsurge absences, diminished work quality and output

and lessened skills to cope (Donovan et al., 2013). It may also activate numerous emotional responses, such as fears, strains, terror, uncertainties, lack of interest in pleasant feelings in former activities (Portman, 2009), impacts on mental well-being of nurses in the form of depression (Wiegand & Funk, 2012), decreased quality of life (Ustun et al., 2004), self-annihilation (Garlow et al., 2008), cardiac ailments (Osby et al., 2001), and decline in speculative performance (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005).

### **Literature Review**

Literature revealed that nursing students are at greater risk to experience distress due to various factors such as academics, training, clinical work, duty rotations, long working hours, supervisor's feedbacks, sleep deprivations and so on. And this stress leads to the damaging effects on their overall health and mental well-being (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). There some factors play important role in protecting trainee nurses from the adverse effect of stress among which perception of have support networks have been found most important (Yusoff, 2011).

### **Perceived Stress**

Stress is a general feeling experienced by almost all human beings. It is an outcome or a response to a situation or action that put demand both physical and psychological on individual which according to Ghaderi et al. (2009) are called stressors. Lazarus (1966) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that for an event or situation to be deemed stressful, it must be perceived as Stressful. They further elaborated that the effect of stress depends on how one perceives the situation, and about his/her available coping resources. Stress prevails in almost all professions, but nursing profession found having high stress levels (Sharma & Kaur, 2011), and lead to the decline in academics, as well as to the initiation and/or severity of mental or physical interventions of various kind such as anxiety and depression (APA, 2013).

### **Perceived Social Support**

Researchers are directing their focus on the means to overcome the harmful effects of stress, by classifying several aspects that may guard individuals from stress. Among them perceived social support in one's life has been found one of the crucial factors in this regard. Zimet et al. (1988) defined PSS as a perception of individual's resources that may become buffer in distressing circumstances in life. Zimet and colleagues measured PSS on three dimensions i.e., family, friends and significant others. According to Liu et al (2009), the term social support reflects social coping resources in which people help each other to promote each other's' well-being. Adam et al. (2003) found that parents, siblings, spouses, friends, or significant others may be considered various sources of SS. Several researched have reported social support as a factor that underestimate stress and enhance people's way of coping and problem-solving skills (Kim et al., 2014; Waite et al., 2011).

### **Perceived Stress and Perceived Social Support**

Professionals from healthcare system such as nurses, are recurrently exposed to contact with anguish, fierceness and deaths, and the consequence of long-term connexion with care taking for the people undergoing traumatic stress and sufferings may be in the form of burnout. psychosocial resources such as SS assists lessening the burden of psychological nature in doctors, nurses, and caregivers (Akosile et al., 2018; Ong et al., 2018; Shiba et al., 2016). Due to the specific natured job, professionals in healthcare systems can never avoid stressors, except those who have social support with them, are less prone

to compassion fatigue and they can better handle their distress (Kim et al., 2019). A sense of coherence and reverence help in maintaining mental well-being of the nurses (Gu et al., 2019).

The present study envisioned to investigate the predictive association between PSS and stress in nursing students. This research would help health managers and mental health professionals provide social support to this important population to improve their well-being, which further lead to better work settings and their productivity.

H<sub>0</sub>1 there won't be a significant predictive relationship between perceived social support and perceived stress in student nurses.

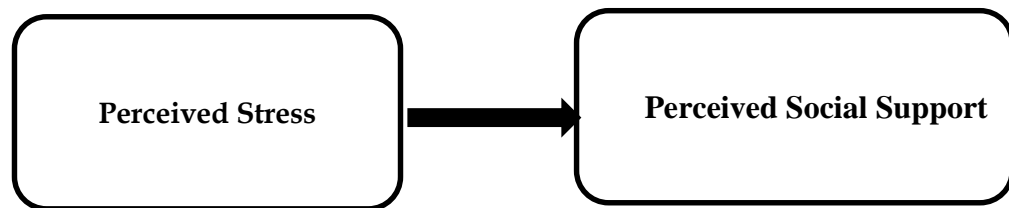


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

## Material and Methods

The nature of the study was quantitative, and correlational research method was used.

## Participants

This study was carried out with 555 nursing students with the age ranged between 19-30 years with mean age of 21.41years (SD= 2.25). The participants were recruited through purposive sampling technique. Only female, full-time nursing students with Pakistani nationality were selected from various nursing schools situated in Karachi, Pakistan. The full-time registered nurses, and the trainee nurses with age below 19 years, or above 30 years, and those who were not Pakistani nationals were excluded from the study.

## Research Tools

*The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) is a self-reported questionnaire. It consists of 12-items envisioned to examine perceptiveness of support from family, friends and significant others. MSPSS has 7 point Likert scale (1= 'strongly agree' to 7= 'strongly disagree'), in which higher score indicate high levels of perceived support.

*Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) is a self-reported measure comprised of 10-items with a 5-point Likert scale i.e., 4 "Very often" to 0 "Never". Sum score is attained by reverse scoring of positive Items i.e., 4, 5, 7 & 8. The total score for PSS can be obtained by summing up the scores on each item. The PSS-10 has been found psychometrically sound tool with high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). In the present study, Urdu version of PSS (Mushtaq & Ahmad, 2020) was used, that too found psychometrically sound i.e., internal consistency= .727,  $p < .01$ , and test-retest reliability= .730,  $p < .01$ .

## Data Collection

A quantitative method was used for this study, and data was collected by using self-reported measures. Research questionnaires (PSS & MPSS) were administered in small groups in a classroom setting. Before administration, research participants were well-versed about the aims and significance of the research, confidentiality, their voluntary participation, and they were assured regarding no harm related to the research. Participants were given informed consent forms for their written consent before filling up the forms.

## Data Analysis

Data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. To answer the research question, mean and standard deviations, frequency and percentages were reported. To answer the research hypothesis Regression analysis was applied to make inference.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Demographics of the Participants**

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
<b>X Age= 21.41</b> <b>SD= 2.25</b>		
<b>Edification</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	155	27.9
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	192	34.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	133	24.0
4 <sup>th</sup> year	75	13.5
<b>Institute Type</b>		
Provincial Govt.	373	67.2
Semi Govt.	46	8.3
Federal	91	16.4
Private	45	8.1
<b>Family System</b>		
Nuclear	379	68.3
Joint	176	31.7

Table 1 represents the demographic information of participants. X age of the partakers was 21.41 years (SD=2.25). 27.9% of the participants were in their 1<sup>st</sup> years, 34.6% were in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 24% were in 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and 13.5% were in 4<sup>th</sup> year of nursing. 67.2 were enrolled in Provincial Governmental nursing school, 8.3% were in semi-Government, 16.4% were in Federal Government, while 8.1% were from private nursing schools. 68.3% of the total sample were living in nuclear families, while other 31.7% were from joint family systems.

**Table 2**  
**Occurrence of Perceived Stress in Student Nurses**

Score Range	<i>f</i> (%)
Severe Stress	122 (22.0)
Moderate Stress	149 (26.9)

Mild Stress	134 (24.1)
No Stress	150 (27.0)

**Table 3**

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Social Support as a Predictor of Perceived Stress in Student Nurses

Regression Weights	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F	t	Sig
PSS	.57	.33	137.18	15.11	.00*

Note.  $p < .001^*$ ; PSS (Predictor); PS (Dependent variable)

Table 3 depicts the result of simple linear regression as PSS has a statistically significant effect ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $t = 15.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on student nurses' perceived stress, and the predictor variable PSS has explained 33% of the change in perceived stress in student nurses in Pakistan.

## Conclusion

Role of nurses has been found crucial in the curative process of patients globally. Nurses are counted as treasured human capital and acknowledged as the spine of the health care system. It would assume that nurses get all respects from the society they deserve, and have comforting and contented lives, however the case is not like this. As, they receive depreciation and refutation from the society which make them experience distress as well as associated mental health problems. The commonness of PS is ominously high in this population globally. In order to thwart nursing students from stress and its damaging effects, it is essential to gauge the occurrence and pervasiveness of PS among the population locally i.e., in the context of Pakistan.

Findings (Table 2) showed the prevalence and levels of PS in nurse students who were not registered from Pakistan Nursing Council yet, and studied in various schools of nursing in Karachi, Pakistan. Results revealed that the overall prevalence of perceived stress was found as 72.9% in which 26.8% students reported having moderate PS. These results remained consistent with global findings and indicating a disturbing fact for mental health professionals. It could be a stimulus, and the first step for mental health professional and ministry to collect approximation the actual prevalence rates of occurrence of stress in this population in Pakistan which will help making programs for nursing students which include the assessment, interventions planning and prevention strategies.

Table 3 depicts the result of simple linear regression as PSS has a statistically significant effect ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $t = 15.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on student nurses' perceived stress. Result shows that the greater the social support, the lesser the stress level would be in study sample. F statistics is 137.18, with an observed significant level of less than 0.001. Thus, the hypothesis that there won't be a significant predictive relationship between PSS and PS in student nurses gets rejected. R<sup>2</sup> is 0.33 thus, for this result, the predictor variable PSS has explained 33% of the change in perceived stress in student nurses in Pakistan.

Anticipating the high prevalence of PS among the targeted population, the predictive association between PSS and PS have been examined. The findings focused on the role of PSS as a significant predictor of PS. These discoveries offer the idea that, adequate social support play a role of safeguard from the stressors in life and help in thwart mental disorders. Keeping in mind the result of the present study, mental health expert, nursing trainers and policy makers all may jointly connect and work on the progress of prevailing support systems. The significance of SS can be spread by doing awareness sessions and workshops. Nursing educationalists can arrange or conduct talks for their

students, whereas psychologists can do trainings at the school level to enhance their social skills.

The importance of the variables of the study cannot be refuted, but these outcomes have given directions for forthcoming hypothesis testing and interventions (clinical and social). It is also suggested that if mental health care providers, syllabus committee and teachers of nursing will integrate above mentioned variables in their therapeutic interventions, curriculum and teaching plans, as this turn out to be valuable for at risk nursing students to keep their wellbeing better.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this research support that nursing mentors and instructors should plan and promote interactive teaching methodology, so that the trainees can be actively intricate in their edification. Trainers should focus on a few small alterations i.e., way to interconnect with their students in teaching and supervisory roles that may have dramatic impact on the performance and wellbeing of their students. As, nursing students' performance in their educational aspect of learning affects directly to their clinical practice and patients' safety. Nursing students can be taught identifying their stressors and effective ways of coping with them by engaging in deep breathing, physical exercise and books reading etc. Stratagems to augment the quality of existing support and building novel support grids should be part of course organization, in order to reduce the risk of psychological illnesses in this vital component of society.

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