

Unearthing the Past: Childhood Trauma among Nursing Students and its Profound Impact on Mental Health and Resilience

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Summary

Trauma affects children from all communities and regions. Among nursing students, the prevalence of childhood trauma is a concern that can have long-lasting effects on their mental health and well-being. Childhood trauma refers to experiences of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and neglect during childhood. The prevalence of childhood trauma among nursing students has significant implications for their mental health and well-being. Various factors contribute to childhood trauma among nursing students, such as personal and family issues, environmental factors etc. Understanding the prevalence of childhood trauma among nursing students is crucial for healthcare institutions and educators to develop appropriate support systems and interventions that address the unique challenges faced by this population.

Key words: Childhood trauma, Coping strategies, Anxiety & depression

Childhood trauma is a significant issue that affects individuals across various professions and walks of life (Lancee et al, 2008; Maunder et al, 2006). It refers to experiences of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and neglect during childhood. It encompasses a range of adverse events that can profoundly impact an individual's development and well-being. These traumatic experiences can occur within the family, community, or institutional settings and often have long-lasting effects into adulthood (Wang et al, 2018; Negele et al, 2015).

Among nursing students, the prevalence of childhood trauma can have long-lasting effects on their mental health and well-being. A recent cross-sectional study conducted in Turkey found that the mean score of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28) total scale was 51.6 among nursing students. This indicates a significant presence of childhood trauma experiences within this population. The study also highlighted that emotional neglect was the most common abuse experienced by nursing students. Emotional abuse and emotional neglect were independently related to depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students (Chousko & Gursoy, 2023; Gursoy & Mehmet, 2023). A study was conducted in eastern China in which 698 nursing students participated;

the study found that 18.6 percent of participants had traumatic experiences in childhood on at least one subscale. Physical neglect (12.5%) was most common followed by emotional neglect (7.3%), sexual abuse (4%), emotional abuse (3.6%) and physical abuse (3%) (Dong et al, 2021).

The prevalence of childhood trauma among nursing students has significant implications for their mental health and well-being. Studies have consistently shown that individuals who have experienced childhood trauma are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and stress (Maunder et al, 2010; Berber & Odaci, 2020). The emotional abuse and neglect experienced during childhood can have long-lasting effects on the psychological development of nursing students. These effects may manifest in heightened levels of distress, impaired coping mechanisms, and decreased overall well-being (Barros et al, 2022; Evgin & Sumen, 2022).

Understanding the impact of childhood trauma on nursing students is crucial for developing effective strategies to support their emotional and psychological needs (Soyunmez & Seki, 2022). This article explores the correlations between childhood trauma and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students. The factors contributing to childhood trauma in this population and potential solutions to address these challenges are also discussed. By shedding light on this topic, we hope to raise awareness and promote the well-being of nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma.

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Need for this study: Childhood trauma has a profound impact on the mental health of nursing students. It is essential to recognise the prevalence of mental health issues among nursing students and implement effective support systems within nursing education. By fostering resilience and providing resources for mental health support, nursing schools can contribute to the well-being and success of their students. It is crucial to prioritise the mental health needs of nursing students and create a supportive and nurturing learning environment that empowers them to overcome adversity and thrive in their nursing careers.

Review of Literature

Dong et al (2024) conducted a study to propose clusters of the association between childhood trauma and resilience in nursing students and to examine their mental health according to these clusters. The analysis identified three clusters: the self-healing group (40.7%), the mildly traumatised with low resiliency group (22.2%), and the healthy group (37.1%). Furthermore, the levels of anxiety and depression significantly differed between the three clusters, with the mildly traumatised with low resiliency group having the highest odds to have anxiety and depression.

Chousko Gürsoy (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study to determine the level of childhood traumas among nursing students and to identify the factors associated with these traumas. The result indicated that the level of childhood traumas was low among nursing students and that they had experienced emotional neglect more frequently than sexual abuse.

Barros et al (2022) conducted a study to investigate the effect of traumatic childhood experiences on the relationship between depression and psychological well-being in a sample of university students. Results showed that early trauma has an important impact on mental health, increasing the risk of depression. However, its impact was greater on positive aspects of health, such as self-acceptance, a fundamental element in the construction of psychological well-being.

Hernández et al (2023) conducted a research study aimed to examine the psychiatric symptoms, adverse childhood experiences, and resilience levels among nursing students. The study included 108 first-semester nursing students from a university in Colombia. The participants completed a virtual survey that included the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ), Wagnild and Young's Resilience Scale, and questions on adverse childhood experiences.

The findings of the study revealed that 6.4 percent of the nursing students had affective

symptoms. The most frequently reported adverse childhood experience was child abuse. The majority of nursing students had medium levels of resilience. The study also found a significant association between exposure to adverse childhood experiences and the presence of symptoms that compromise mental health. Further, the presence of these symptoms was associated with alterations in domains of resilience.

Childhood Trauma among Nursing Students

Nursing students who have grown up in households with parents or caregivers struggling with substance abuse issues and exposure to domestic violence or witnessing violence within the family can significantly impact a nursing student's childhood and contribute to the experience of trauma. Nursing students with parents with mental health conditions may be at a higher risk of experiencing childhood trauma, as these conditions can affect parental caregiving abilities. Nursing students who experience bullying or harassment from peers, faculty members, or clinical preceptors may be at a higher risk of trauma. The demanding nature of nursing education, including exams, clinical rotations, and high workload, can contribute to stress and potentially exacerbate existing trauma. Insufficient support from faculty, mentors, or peers can leave nursing students feeling isolated and unsupported, potentially amplifying the impact of childhood trauma (Soyunmez & Seki 2022; Chousko & Gursoy, 2023). Understanding the factors contributing to childhood trauma among nursing students is essential for designing interventions and support systems that address these specific challenges.

Childhood Trauma and Nursing Students' Mental Health

Childhood trauma has been consistently linked to an increased risk of depression among nursing students. The emotional abuse and neglect experienced during childhood can disrupt the development of healthy coping mechanisms and contribute to depressive symptoms. Studies have shown that nursing students with a history of childhood trauma are more likely to experience moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms. The impact of childhood trauma on depression levels is a pressing concern that requires targeted interventions and support for affected nursing students. Anxiety is another mental health issue commonly associated with childhood trauma among nursing students. The chronic stress and emotional dysregulation caused by childhood trauma can heighten anxiety levels and impair daily functioning. Nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma may exhibit symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder,

social anxiety, or specific phobias. The impact of childhood trauma on anxiety levels necessitates the development of comprehensive support systems and interventions that address the unique needs of nursing students.

Childhood trauma can significantly contribute to stress levels among nursing students as it activates the biological stress system. The experiences of abuse, neglect, or adverse childhood events can create a heightened stress response, making nursing students more vulnerable to stressors in their academic and clinical environments. Stress resulting from childhood trauma can manifest in various ways, including burnout, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction. Implementing stress management techniques and providing resources for nursing students to cope with trauma-related stress is crucial for their overall well-being (Barros et al, 2023; Hedrick et al, 2021; Valladares-Garrido et al, 2023; De Bellis & Abigali, 2014).

Coping Strategies and Resilience Building

Developing effective coping strategies is essential for nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma. Positive coping strategies have a protective effect against depression, stress and anxiety. Encouraging nursing students to seek support from trusted friends, family members, or mental health professionals can provide them with a safe space to process their trauma and develop healthy coping mechanisms. Promoting self-care activities such as exercise, mindfulness, journaling, and hobbies can help nursing students manage stress and develop resilience. Providing access to therapy and counselling services can be instrumental in helping nursing students navigate the impact of childhood trauma on their mental health (Wang et al, 2021).

Resilience-building is crucial to supporting nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma. Fostering resilience can help them develop the necessary skills to overcome adversity and navigate the challenges of their academic and professional journeys. Educating nursing students about the impact of childhood trauma and providing information on resilience-building techniques can empower them to take an active role in their healing process. Encouraging nursing students to identify and utilise their strengths in their personal and professional lives can enhance their sense of self-efficacy and resilience. Connecting nursing students with mentors or role models who have overcome similar challenges can provide them with inspiration and guidance as they navigate their healing journey (Dong et al, 2021).

By implementing coping strategies and resilience-building techniques, nursing students

can better manage the impact of childhood trauma and thrive in their educational and professional pursuits.

Support Systems and Interventions

Institutions that provide nursing education should prioritise the well-being of their students and establish comprehensive support systems. Offering on-campus mental health services, including counselling and therapy, can provide nursing students with easily accessible resources for support. Incorporating trauma-informed approaches into the nursing curriculum can help educators understand the unique needs of students who have experienced childhood trauma and adapt teaching methods accordingly. Establishing peer support networks or mentorship programmes can create a sense of community and facilitate connections among nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma (Girouard & Bailey, 2017).

Collaborating with community resources can further enhance the support available to nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma. Partnering with local organisations that offer support groups for individuals who have experienced childhood trauma can provide additional avenues of support for nursing students. Collaborating with community organisations to raise awareness about childhood trauma and promote destigmatisation can help create a more supportive environment for nursing students. Developing referral networks with community mental health providers can ensure that nursing students can access specialised care when needed (Fino et al, 2022).

By building robust support systems and leveraging community resources, nursing institutions can create an environment that fosters the well-being and success of students who have experienced childhood trauma.

Recommendations for Nursing Education and Practice

Integrating trauma-informed care principles into nursing education and practice is critical for effectively supporting nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma. Some recommendations for implementation include Training for faculty and staff, Curriculum integration, and Clinical practice guidelines. Creating safe and inclusive learning environments is essential for nursing students who have experienced childhood trauma. Some strategies to consider include establishing clear policies, promoting diversity and inclusion, and encouraging open communication.

Nursing education programmes can better support the unique needs of students who have experienced childhood trauma by prioritising trauma-informed care and creating safe learning environments.

Indian Scenario

Presently, there is a dearth of evidences on the topic related to childhood trauma among Nursing students or healthcare professionals.

Future Research Directions

While there has been progress in understanding childhood trauma among nursing students, further research is needed to continue advancing knowledge in this area. Conducting longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of childhood trauma on nursing students' mental health and well-being can provide valuable insights into their resilience and recovery. Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and support systems implemented in nursing education programmes can help identify best practices and areas for improvement. Investigating the cultural factors that influence the experience and impact of childhood trauma among nursing students from diverse backgrounds can enhance the development of culturally sensitive interventions.

By addressing these research gaps, we can continue to enhance our understanding of childhood trauma among nursing students and develop evidence-based strategies to support their well-being.

Conclusion

Childhood trauma is a significant concern among nursing students that can profoundly affect their mental health and well-being. Understanding the prevalence, impact, and factors contributing to childhood trauma is crucial for nursing institutions, educators, and healthcare professionals. By implementing trauma-informed care principles, creating safe learning environments, and providing comprehensive support systems, nursing education programmes can better address the unique needs of students who have experienced childhood trauma. Through research, awareness, and proactive interventions, we can foster resilience and promote the well-being of nursing students on their journey to becoming compassionate and competent healthcare professionals.

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