



Knowledge of Nursing Students on Nursing Management of Psychiatric Emergencies: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Psychiatric emergencies are acute mental health crises that demand immediate intervention to prevent harm, and nurses, often the first responders in such situations, require adequate knowledge and skills for effective management. **Aim:** The present study was undertaken to assess the knowledge of nursing students regarding the management of psychiatric emergencies and to examine its association with selected demographic variables. **Methods:** A descriptive research design was adopted, and the study was conducted among 130 B.Sc. Nursing students from selected nursing colleges in Thrissur district, Kerala. Data were collected using a structured knowledge questionnaire consisting of 10 items, which categorized students' knowledge into poor (0–3), moderate (4–7), and good (8–10). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze knowledge levels, and chi-square test was applied to determine associations between knowledge and demographic factors. **Results:** The findings revealed that a majority of students (61.5%) demonstrated moderate knowledge, 30.8% showed good knowledge, and only 7.7% had poor knowledge regarding psychiatric emergency management. A significant association was identified between knowledge level and gender ($\chi^2 = 10.717$, $p = 0.005$), whereas other demographic variables such as age, year of study, and prior training did not show statistically significant associations. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that nursing students predominantly possess moderate knowledge of psychiatric emergency management, indicating scope for improvement. These findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen nursing curricula by incorporating simulation-based training, practical workshops, and enhanced clinical exposure. Targeted educational interventions will not only increase competency levels among nursing students but also contribute to improved patient care and outcomes during psychiatric emergencies.

KEYWORDS: Psychiatric emergencies, Nursing management, Nursing students, Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric emergencies are acute disturbances in thought, behavior, or mood that pose an immediate threat to the individual or others and require urgent intervention. These include suicidal attempts, violent behavior, acute psychosis, and substance withdrawal crises. Globally, psychiatric emergencies account for 5–10% of emergency department (ED) visits, and the World Health Organization estimates that nearly 22% of people exposed to emergencies suffer from mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder^{1,2}. In the United States alone, mental health–related emergencies represent nearly eight million emergency department visits annually³. These statistics highlight the significant and rising burden of psychiatric emergencies worldwide, placing increasing demand on healthcare systems and underscoring the crucial role of nurses as frontline responders.

In India, behavioral and psychiatric emergencies represent a growing clinical challenge. A population-based study found that behavioral emergencies accounted for 11.4% of all emergency service calls, with suicide attempts comprising the majority⁴. Psychiatric referrals in tertiary hospitals constitute about 2.8% of total emergency department visits, involving conditions ranging from somatoform disorders to acute psychoses⁵. Retrospective analyses of Indian psychiatric emergency units also report thousands of cases annually, reflecting the high clinical load and the pressing need for specialized preparedness among healthcare professionals⁶. These findings highlight the increasing incidence of acute psychiatric conditions in Indian hospitals, where nurses are often the first to assess and manage such crises.

Kerala, despite being a state with relatively strong health indicators, also reports a significant prevalence of psychiatric morbidity. The National Mental Health Survey (2015–16) estimated a lifetime prevalence of 14.14% and a current prevalence of 11.36% for mental health disorders in Kerala, with suicidality risk at 2.23%⁷. A large community-based survey further revealed that more than 12% of adults were affected by psychiatric conditions requiring intervention, with nearly 9% suffering from common mental disorders⁸. Another rural survey estimated the prevalence of psychiatric disorders at 14.57 per 1,000 population⁹. These figures demonstrate the pressing need to strengthen nursing education and training in psychiatric emergency management, ensuring timely and effective care delivery in Kerala's healthcare settings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A study to assess the knowledge of nursing students on nursing management of psychiatric emergencies in a selected nursing college in Thrissur district.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. To assess the knowledge of nursing students regarding the management of psychiatric emergencies.
2. To determine the association between the knowledge of nursing students on the management of psychiatric emergencies and selected demographic variables.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Nursing students will have varying levels of knowledge on the management of psychiatric emergencies

- Demographic variables will be associated with the knowledge of nursing students on psychiatric emergency management

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Approach and Design

A quantitative approach with a descriptive research design was adopted to assess the knowledge of nursing students regarding the management of psychiatric emergencies and its association with demographic variables.

Setting and Population

The study was conducted in selected nursing colleges in Thrissur district, Kerala. The population comprised B.Sc. Nursing students who had studied or were currently studying psychiatry.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 130 students was selected using convenient sampling.

Tools and Instruments

- Demographic Proforma: Collected information on age, gender, year of study, prior psychiatric training, clinical exposure, institutional location, and family or personal experience.
- Structured Knowledge Questionnaire: A 10-item multiple-choice tool developed by the researcher. Scores were classified as poor (0–3), moderate (4–7), and good (8–10).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by six experts, with all items meeting I-CVI ≥ 0.8 and overall CVI of 1.0. Reliability, tested using the split-half method, yielded a coefficient of 0.7.

Results

Section I: Knowledge of Nursing Students Regarding Psychiatric Emergency Management

A total of 130 nursing students participated in the study. The findings revealed that the majority of students, 61.5%, demonstrated a moderate level of knowledge regarding the management of psychiatric emergencies. Nearly one-third of the participants (30.8%) exhibited good knowledge, while only a small proportion (7.7%) showed poor knowledge. The overall mean knowledge score was 2.23 with a standard deviation of 0.578, reflecting that the general trend of knowledge among students was moderate. These results suggest that while most students possessed an average understanding of psychiatric emergency management, there remains a gap in attaining consistently high levels of knowledge across the group.

Section II: Association Between Knowledge and Demographic Variables

The association between knowledge levels and selected demographic variables was examined using the Chi-square test. A statistically significant relationship was found between knowledge level and gender, with a chi-square value of 10.717 at 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.005. This indicates that gender had an influence on the knowledge scores of nursing students. In contrast, no significant association was observed between knowledge levels and other demographic variables such as age, year of study, prior psychiatric clinical experience, location of the educational institution, or any previous training in psychiatric emergency management. These findings highlight that although demographic characteristics were largely unrelated to

knowledge levels, gender emerged as a factor significantly influencing students' preparedness in managing psychiatric emergencies.

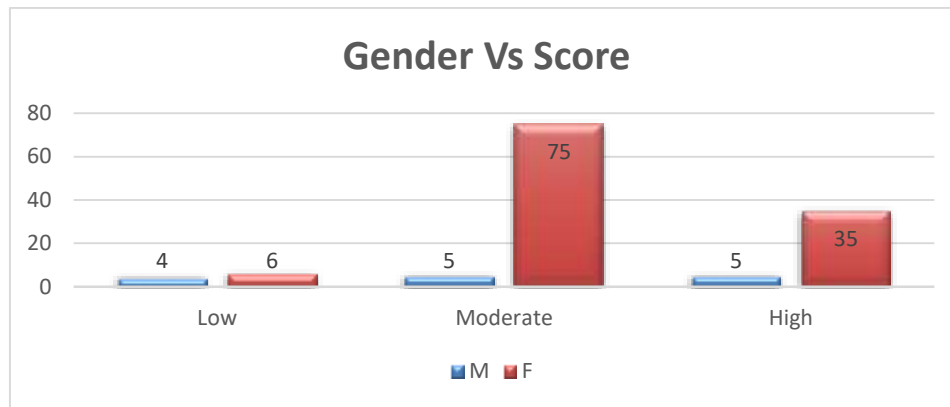


Figure 1 : Association between gender and knowledge of nursing management of psychiatric emergency

Discussion

The study revealed that most nursing students possessed moderate knowledge of psychiatric emergency management. These findings are consistent with Pawar et al. (2020), who reported similar trends of moderate preparedness among student nurses. A significant association with gender was observed, which echoes Sullivan et al. (2019), though some studies (Hassan et al., 2018) reported no such relationship.

The results emphasize the importance of hands-on training. Simulation-based education has been shown to significantly improve competence in psychiatric emergencies (McKay et al., 2023; Reddy & Iyer, 2020). Curriculum reforms integrating role-play, workshops, and case-based learning could bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Conclusion

The study concludes that nursing students in Thrissur demonstrate moderate levels of knowledge on psychiatric emergency management. Educational interventions, especially simulation and clinical exposure, are essential to enhance preparedness and competency. Addressing identified gaps will strengthen future nurses' ability to manage psychiatric crises effectively, ultimately improving patient safety and outcomes.

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