

Mental Wellness and Self-Care in Undergraduate Nursing Students

Deana Wilhoite, MS, RN, Jessica Gay, MSN, RNC-MNN, CNE, Alyson Luckenbach, MSN, RN, PCCN and Cara Busenhart, Ph.D., CNM, APRN, FACNM
University of Kansas School of Nursing
Kansas City, KS



Background

Understanding the high level of stress for nursing students, undergraduate faculty seek to better understand student stress and to provide an opportunity to practice stress reduction strategies as part of a personalized mental wellness action plan.

A pilot study was designed to investigate undergraduate nursing students' experiences of stress and mental wellness and their self care practices. Faculty created an educational self-care seminar called "Stress Less Workshop" to use self-care strategies including the KU School of Nursing Mental Wellness Action Plan (MWAP) and other tools were explored to reduce stress and improve mental wellness.

Purpose and Research Questions

Purpose

To compare the stress/mental wellness of undergraduate (UG) nursing students before and after attending the Stress Less Workshop. Findings provide information about perceived stress and self-care practices implemented by students to manage their stress and improve resilience.

Research Hypotheses:

1. UG nursing students have high levels of stress, with scores greater than average (14 or higher) on Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).
2. UG nursing students will use more self-care practices (total number recorded on Mental Wellness Self-Care Inventory) 3-4 months after instruction and demonstration in an instructional workshop on stress and self-care.
3. UG nursing students that employ more self-care practices will report lower levels of stress.

Methods

Study Type and Design:

One-group pretest-posttest intervention design across time with measurement of stress/mental wellness and inventory of self-care practices at pretest (T1) and 3-4 months post-intervention (T2).

An educational workshop for UG nursing students was designed by faculty and held in Fall 2019, "Stress Less Workshop". Participants discussed the importance of mental wellness, reviewed the MWAP, discussed strategies for self-care, performed self-assessment of, and practiced self-care strategies in a hands-on, active learning environment. Strategies practiced include massage, mindfulness/breathing exercises, pet therapy, music, and humor.

Measurement Tools:

- The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Cohen (1994) is a validated and reliable tool for measuring perceptions of stress. Scores are associated with greater vulnerability to depressive symptoms.
- The Mental Wellness Self-Care Inventory (MWSCI) was developed by the investigator and is based on the Mental Wellness Self-Care Plan (University of Kansas School of Nursing, 2019). The inventory tool has been validated by content experts and the original authors of the Mental Wellness Self-Care Plan.

Data analysis performed within Excel with routine descriptive statistics.

Limitations

Small number of participants; N=24.
Demographic data (race, gender, age) were not collected.

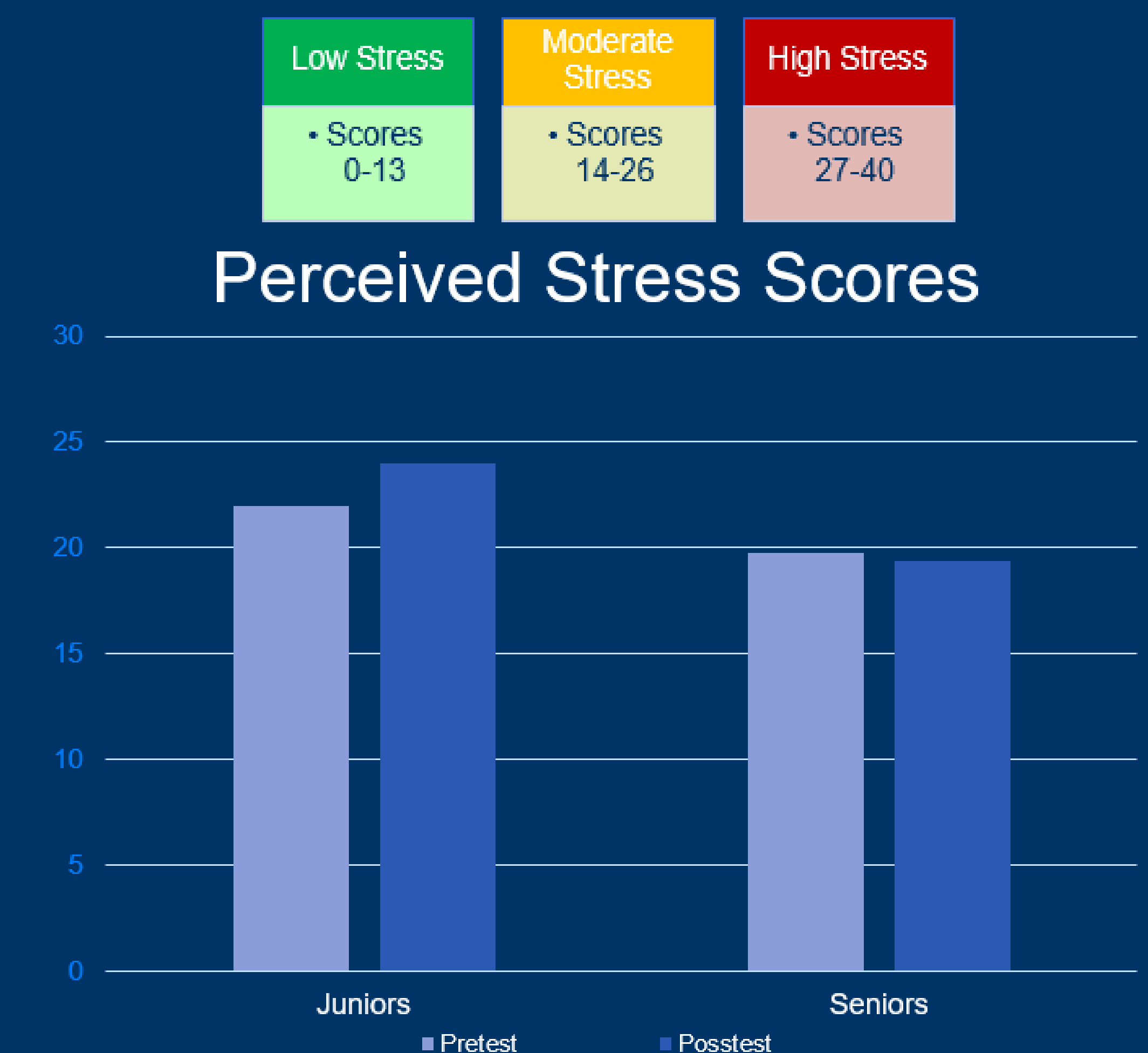
Participant Characteristics

Pretest: N= 18
Junior Level Students = 6 (33.3%)
Senior Level Students = 12 (66.7%)

Posttest: N=24
Junior Level Students = 5 (50%)
Senior Level Students = 5 (50%)

Results

PSS Scores range 0-40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.



Most used self-care strategies: 7-8 hrs sleep (pre and post), listen to music (pre and post), avoid substances (pre), avoid the news (pre and post), support people (pre), pets (pre), take a break (post)

Rarely used self-care strategies: avoid caffeine (pre and post), take a walk (pre), deep breathing (pre), avoid social media/devices (pre and post), friends (post), massage (post), support group (post), pets (post)

Discussion

Students don't avoid social media or phones but do try to get good sleep. Exposure to the self-care plan doesn't seem to have increased their use of coping strategies. Stress was higher in the posttest period; collection time occurred at the beginning of a global pandemic. Junior stress levels were higher than Seniors. Both groups seem to have a "bell curve" of low, moderate (peak), and high perceived stress.

Nursing Implications

Plan to complete study with T3 posttest at 1 year, scheduled for November 2020. A larger sample size is needed to determine significant impact of interventions such as the MWAP and Stress Less Workshop on UG students' mental wellness and levels of stress. Future research should include collection of demographic data of participants to evaluate diversity and generalizability of results. Anecdotally, students reported enjoyment of the StressLess workshop and appreciated faculty support.



KU School of Nursing's Mental Wellness Action Plan (Front)

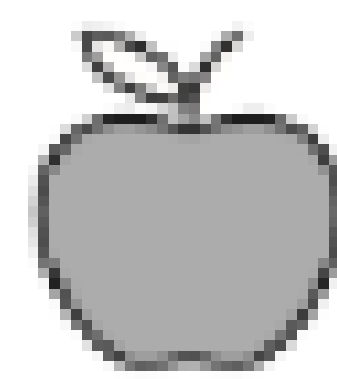
MENTAL WELLNESS ACTION PLAN

How are you doing? Are you doing things to protect your physical and mental health?

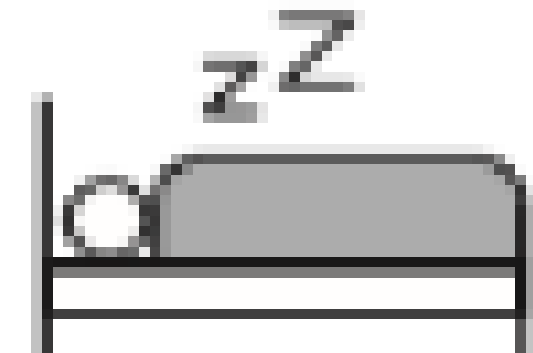
SAFETY ZONE:

Things are going well.
You feel balanced, am generally happy and effective in work/life.

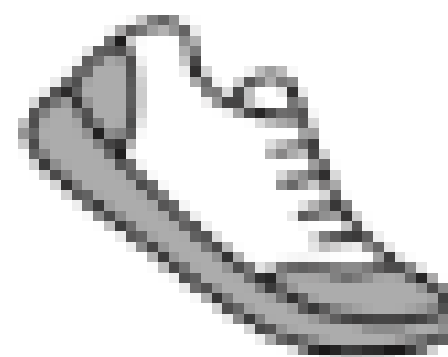
You make healthy food choices.



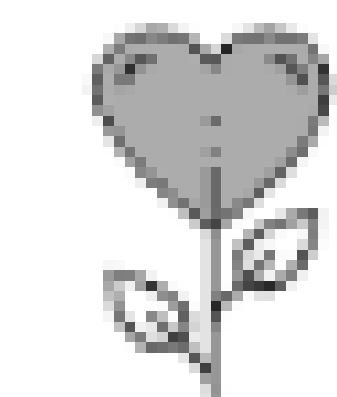
You get adequate sleep (7-8 hours).



You exercise.



You are hopeful, have goals and plans, and you know your values.



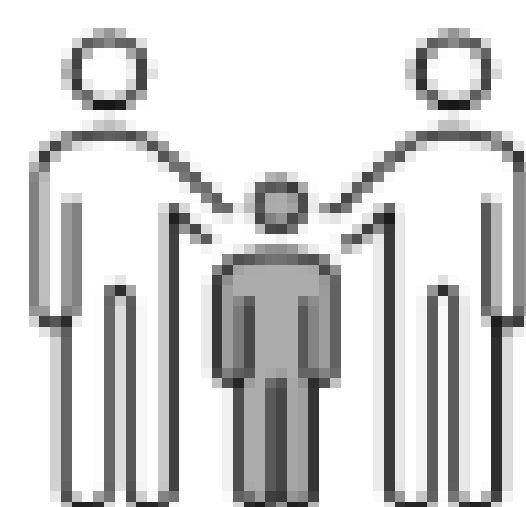
You feel grateful and make lists of positive things.



You have an optimist outlook.



You connect with family, friends and others.



CAUTION ZONE:

Pay attention to yourself.
If you notice these, practice items on your self-care plan.

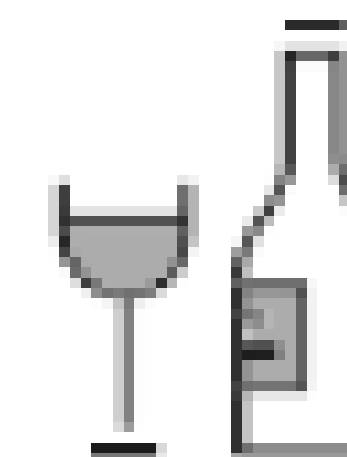
You are not sleeping well.



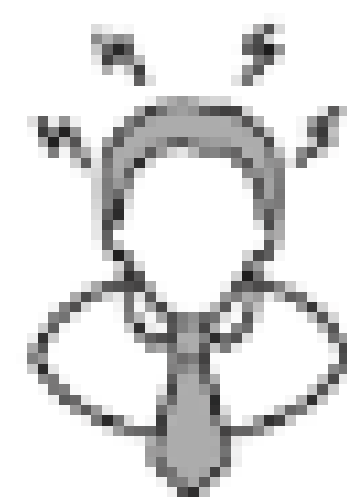
You overeat (weight gain) or you are not hungry (weight loss).



You use alcohol or drugs to numb feelings (more than 1-2 drinks per day).



You are moody, irritated and are easily angered.



You cry more often than usual (once a week or more).



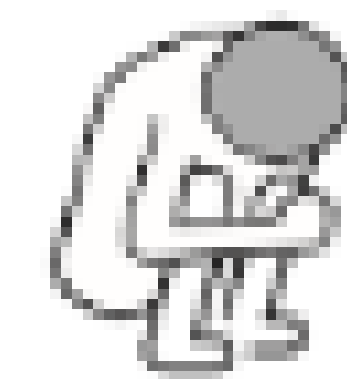
You experience negative thinking, increased muscle tension and headaches.



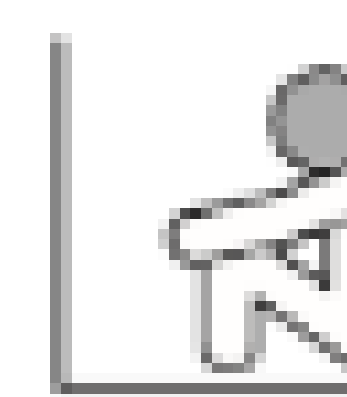
DANGER ZONE:

You are in decline. Call your health care provider if you are experiencing these feelings most of the time.

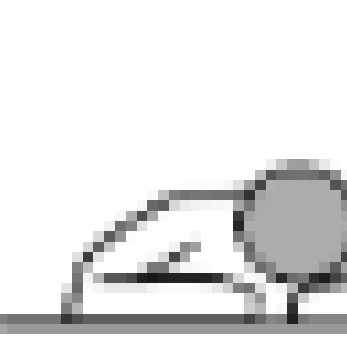
You are feeling depressed and hopeless.



You don't enjoy normal activities and feel isolated.



You are fatigued, lack sleep and call in sick to work.



You move more slowly than normal.



You feel you are a failure (feelings of shame).



You lack concentration.



You have thoughts of hurting yourself or killing yourself.



KU School of Nursing's Mental Wellness Action Plan (Back)

MENTAL WELLNESS SELF-CARE PLAN

What are you doing? Create your own self-care plan here.

AM I TAKING CARE OF MYSELF PHYSICALLY?

TAKE CARE OF MY BODY

- Eat healthy food
- Sunshine every day
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep daily
- Exercise 3-4 times a week
- Limit or avoid caffeine
- Do I need to limit my alcohol/other?
- Take medications as prescribed
- _____
- _____

UNPLUG

- Skip checking social media
- Don't watch the news for a few days
- Limit TV to 30 minutes per day
- Don't check your phone for _____
- No electronic devices for 2 hours before bedtime
- Turn on your e-mail "out of office notice" in the evening
- _____

DO I NEED QUIET TIME?

USE OPTIMISM EXERCISE

- Write "three good things" daily
- Think about your three good things for 15 minutes
- Silence your inner critic—write an encouraging letter to yourself
- Commit to giving my best effort
- Do not dwell on negative thoughts/worries
- _____
- _____

TRY CONTEMPLATION/MEDITATION

- Spend time thinking about what you really value
- Take a quiet walk
- Say a prayer
- Try deep breathing exercises
- Start meditation/app (try Mindfulness Coach app)
- _____
- _____

Practicing regularly will help when you meet a stress in your life.

DO I NEED TO CONNECT WITH SOMEONE?

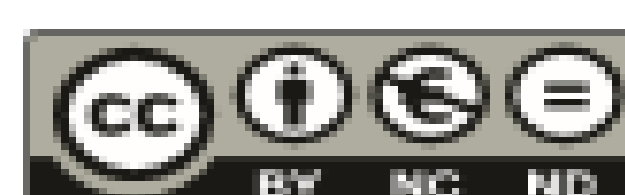
CONNECT WITH PEOPLE

- List your support "people"
- Call one of your support people regularly
- Meet with a friend for coffee
- Go for a drive with a friend
- Join a club or support group
- Volunteer
- Take a class
- Participate at your place of worship
- _____

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

- Listen to music (your emergency play list)
- Spend time with a pet
- Take up a hobby
- Take a "mini break" before becoming overwhelmed
- Plan a vacation or "stay-cation"
- Get a massage
- Watch a favorite movie _____
- _____

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