

## Stress Management Techniques as A Tool for Improving Head Nurses Job Performance: Literature Review



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### 1.ABSTRACT

Nursing, by its nature, a profession with a higher degree of stress and is widely perceived as one of the most inherently stressful occupations, often characterized by high rates of staff turnover, absenteeism and burnout. Justifying stress has become the main concern in many fields, especially in nursing management, due to low output and poor staff morale as problems related to stress. Stress management aims to maintain stress level to the point that causes a dynamic, live, and creative organization that encourage head nurses to be innovative, creative and productive with good job performance. This literature aimed to present an overview summary of some stress management techniques as a tool for improving head nurses job performance through study the impact of using various techniques such as problem solving, time management, and relaxation techniques like progressive muscles, deep breathing exercise and guided imagery exercise on head nurses job performance.

**Keywords:** head nurses; job performance; stress management; stress management techniques.

### 2.Introduction:

Nursing is considered a high-risk, high-pressure profession, given the fast-paced working environment and constant need to handle emergencies. Thus, head nurses are considered susceptible to psychological stress and mental health problems (Ling, Xianxiu, & Xiaowei, 2020). As well as, making them more vulnerable to burnout and poor performance than other healthcare professions. (Bentzen-Mercer, 2021). Furthermore head nurses generally experience boredom, poorer cognitive and physical performance, procrastination, diminished attention, concentration, decision-making, and short-term memory (Azizollah, Zaman, Khaled & Razieh, 2021 and Mahony, Burroughs, & Hieatt, 2021).

Thawabieh & Qaisy (2012) defined stress as the internal response to external events. In other words stress is what the body and mind experience when we try to adopt a continually changing environment. Managing stress enable the head nurse to function at his or her optimal level, in a healthy and positive manner (Hersch, Cook, Deitz, Kaplan, Hughes, & et al, 2016). The goal of stress management is not to eliminate all stress, but to keep stress levels within an optimal range. Stress management is an active, directive, educational form of therapy. all forms of stress management assume the model of skills training (Chesak, Cutshall, Bowe, Montanari & Bhagra, 2019 And Azizollah et al.,2021).

Stress management techniques is a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a head nurses 's level of stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. Stress management techniques are considered as a cognitive,

behavioral and psychological efforts to deal with stress, (Sinha, 2016 and Lary, Borimnejad, & Mardani-Hamooleh, 2019). a variety of techniques can be used such as problem solving, time-management, relaxation techniques as progressive muscles relaxation, deep breathing, guided imagery. It helps head nurses recognize partial thought patterns and inefficient behaviour (Abbasian, et al., 2014 & Fletcher et al.,2019).

A head nurse is the one who assumes responsibility for managing the human and material resources of a nursing unit and takes lead in developing the staff to provide quality of patient care and a good conductive environment to help staff growth and satisfaction (Abd Elhamed, et al., 2019). Head nurses are usually in close contact with other staff nurses so, the effectiveness of their activities and management skills they have could be beneficial for their health care organizations (Abdelrazek, 2017 and Abd Elhamed, 2019).

Job performance among head nurses is the set of head nurses' behaviors that can be monitored, measured, and assessed regarding the achievement in the head nurse level. Good job performance is a necessary factor in determining an organization achievements (Kim, & Han, 2019). Head nurses performance is a complementary component of patient care and managerial skills, it is an important determinant of quality of healthcare services that clarify effectiveness and efficiency that make a payment to health organization goals (sumand &ruiz, 2020). Hospitals needs well performing head nurses to meet their goals to bring the products and services they specialized in and lastly to accomplish competitive advantages (Abd Elhamed and Mohamed, 2019).

### Literature Searching Strategy

The authors searched electronic medical and health care databases, including Google Scholar, Ovid, ScienceDirect, PubMed, ProQuest, ERIC, and EBSCOhost, to find appropriate literature on this subject. As keywords, the following search phrases were used: "stress," "stress management," "stress management techniques," "problem solving," "time management," "relaxation techniques," "deep breathing exercise," "progressive muscles relaxation exercise," "guided imagery exercise," "stress management training," "job performance," "performance standards," "performance evaluation and measurement," "challenges facing performance evaluation," "performance management," "head nurses," "head nurses job performance," and "strategies to improve head nurses job performance".

### Stress Management Techniques as A Tool for Improving Head Nurses' Job Performance: Literature Review

Nowadays, stress is a major concern in the nursing profession with work overload, nurse shortages, role conflict, work/time pressure, job overload, role ambiguity, inadequate social support, inadequate leadership, organizational constraints, and new technology that lead to high turnover rates. (Coventry, Maslin - Prothero, & Smith, 2015). In addition Job stress is one of the most important workplace health risks for nurses and head nurses (Dagget, Molla, & Belachew, 2016). These will increase the level of head nurses responsibility and accountability and demands for new knowledge and skills which may negatively effect on job performance (Labrague, McEnroe - Petite, Leocadio, Van Bogaert, & Cummings, 2018 and Dua, 2019).

**The National Institute of Mental Health (2015)** defined stress as "the brain's response to any demand" As well as, stress is the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological reactions a person experiences in response to environmental threats or demands. In addition, stress is a process of ongoing transaction and relationship, encompassing a whole series of stimulus, response, altered stimulus, altered response, and so on. (Johan, Sarwar, & Majeed, 2017 and Howeri, & ALBashtawy, 2020).

A stressful event or stressful condition or perception of stresses that produces psychological or physical reaction in the individual as a result of stressor . A stressor is a biochemical or biological agent, resulting from an environmental and external stimulus event that causes stress to an organism (Rossnerova, Izzotti, Pulliero, Bast, Rattan, & Rossner, 2020).

Job stress as a phenomenon remains the subject of massive scientific research. the concept of stress is limited and unhelpful in understanding the link between work and well-being. However, occupational health and health and safety legislations acknowledge the effect of work related stress on the health of employees. Moreover, it has been well recognized that the ability to manage feelings and handle stress is considered one aspect of emotional intelligence (Foy, Dwyer, Nafarrete, Hammoud, & Rockett, 2019). Job stress is

defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, and needs (Pecino, Mañas, Díaz, Aguilar, Padilla & López, 2019).

Head nurses assume responsibility for the normal operation of the whole ward and the quality of patient care. In the course of their work, they tend to suffer a great deal of stress. The issue of job stress and poor performance among head nurses has recently drawn attention. As shortage of nurses and a heavy workload result in job stress. Moreover, head nurse experience high burnout, and high emotional exhaustion so they tend to face a great deal of job stress and poor performance (Iuan, 2017).

**Powell & Enright (2015)**. Defined stress management as the identification and analysis of problems related to stress, and the application of a variety of therapeutic tools to alter either the source of stress or the experience of stress. These therapeutic tools are utilized within an integrated and conceptually meaningful framework. Also, Stress management is a collection of health promotion behaviours that functions to protect and defend anyone from the harmful physiological and psychological effects of stress (Seaward, 2017). Effective stress management techniques as problem solving abilities, time management and relaxation techniques are crucial to improve work environment, reduce stress and increase job performance among head nurses (Higazee, 2018 and Bakker, & de Vries, 2021).

Problem solving is defined as a response given in an important and difficult situation, where critical thinking is required for a solution. Problem solving skills determine a person's ability to relate productively. Problem solving is essential in nursing management. (Mahony et al.,2021).

Head nurses have to face some unique problems such as a hospital-medical centre environment, the personalities of various members of the medical team, and all the drama, trauma, joy, and sadness found in a hospital, as well as having to cope with the usual problems a head nurse may encounter; therefore, a high degree of stress is involved in nursing management, such a degree of stress also affects the problem solving skills of the head nurses. (Ahmadi, 2013). Head nurses are expected to be able to choose the best solution for the problems encountered by patients and nursing staff in order to meet their needs. However, it was found in a research study among head nurses that they were lacking in problem formulation skills (Kantanen, Kaunonen, Helminen & Suominen, 2017).

There are many advantages with learning problem solving skills for head nurses and anyone in any situation. It works on a personal level and for organisational purposes. It provides a tool to effectively understand the problem and dealing with it in a systematic way, It can be very cost efficient, promotes a greater understanding of the whole, takes advantage of thinking, flexibility and creativity. Also, it often encourages cooperation and a useful tool for reducing stress (Ahmadi, 2013).

Time management is an art and a science, everybody has to learn how to do it. Some people have a good skill at it but not everybody. Time is a priceless source. Time is the single resources that can't be changed, can't be taken back once it is used and is used completely at the appreciation of the owner. No one can control the moving of time but everyone is able to decide how to use it (Razali, Rusiman, Gan & Arbin, 2018).

Time management plays a very important role not only in organization but also in personal live. Adebayo (2015) defined time management as a self-management with an explicit focus on time in deciding what to do; on how much time to allocate to the activities; on how activities can be done more efficiently and on when the time is right for particular activities. Time management steps comprises effective planning, goals setting and objectives, setting deadline, delegation of authority , prioritizing activities as per their importance, spending the right time on the right activities (Fixer, 2019).

Time management skills have become progressively important predictors of managers' success in today's organizations. Many health care organizations have cut back their processes and flattened their structures in an attempt to accomplish more efficient performance and decrease costs. Thus, effective time management skills are especially important for managerial success in the newly restructured health care organizations (Elshaer, 2015). Head nurses are managing time effectively to complete their everyday assignments was of the greatest importance. The ability to complete goals and take care of patients and units work was a large portion of how the head nurses reflected their levels of success or failure (Krefetz, 2015) .

Relaxation, or easing of physical or mental stress, is often thought to be the antidote to stress. Relaxation and anxiety are thought to be opposing emotions, in that one cannot be relaxed and anxious at the same time. Relaxation techniques are strategies used to reduce stress and anxiety. Relaxation techniques work to manage the fight-or-flight response, or stress reaction (Anand, 2020).

*Diaphragmatic breathing, or deep abdominal breathing*, is a technique designed to slow one's breathing and regulate oxygen intake. Diaphragmatic breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths with the intention of expanding and contracting the diaphragm, which is a muscle separating the chest and abdominal cavities. (Shahriari, Dehghan, Pahlavanzadeh, & Hazini, 2017). Typically, diaphragmatic breathing exercises involve sitting in a comfortable chair or lying down and taking slow, deep breaths with the intention of breathing so that the air expands the abdomen more than the chest (Pardede, Simanjuntak, & Manalu, 2020).

Research suggests that practicing diaphragmatic breathing can significantly reduce perceived stress. In one study, a sample of medical school students participated in a deep breathing program for 5 minutes per day prior to class over a 10-month period. After six weeks, students engaging in the deep breathing exercises

reported significantly less test anxiety, self-doubt, nervousness and increased concentration during exams. (Toussaint et al, 2021)

*Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)* refers to a series of techniques that involves the repeated tensing and relaxing of various muscle groups in the body. Often, deep breathing is integrated, whereby an individual undergoes a deep breathing exercise while also tensing and relaxing muscle groups. (Pradhan, Samantaray, & Pahantasingh, 2020)

The goal of PMR is to affect the autonomic arousal component of stress and anxiety via a reduction in skeletal muscle tension. It is believed that as skeletal muscle tension diminishes, other aspects of autonomic arousal, such as blood pressure and heart rate, also decrease. Subsequent research has suggested that comparable effects can be generated with far fewer sessions. Similar to diaphragmatic breathing, PMR sessions typically involve assuming a comfortable position and taking deep breaths while tensing and relaxing 16 different muscle groups (e.g., starting with the head muscles and working down the body before ending with the feet) (Chaudhuri, Manna, Mandal, & Pattanayak, 2020).

*Guided imagery*, or visualization, refers to a type of relaxation training that involves the use of language to create calming, sensory rich experiences in one's imagination. Although guided imagery techniques can vary widely, most involve guiding an individual toward places or situations in which they feel calm and comfortable, and individuals are encouraged to free their minds of any interfering thoughts or daily concerns (Felix, Ferreira, Oliveira, Barichello, & Pires, 2018 and Gray, & Brown, 2020).

In sum, a variety of relaxation exercises have been shown to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. Whether it is diaphragmatic breathing, PMR, guided imagery, meditation, or a host of others not discussed here, it only takes a few minutes per day to improve stress levels. (MacLean, et al 2019)

Stress management training have been demonstrated as an effective way of providing a wide variety of head nurses with the skills to cope with work/life tensions also stress management program are based on the principle that while the stressful events in an individual's life and career cannot always be eliminated, his maladaptive perception and reaction to them can be. When head nurses are equipped with the skills needed to recognize and deal effectively with stress, the probability of their developing stress related disorders and subjective feelings of tension or pressure are decreased in addition to improving their job performance. (Pahlevani, Ebrahimi, Radmehr, Amini, & Yazdani, 2015).

Today, every organization's primary goal is achieving and maintaining effective performance of its head nurses. Job performance refers to the behaviors that are relevant to the organizational goals and under the control of the individual employees. job performance is a function of the individual's performance of specific tasks

that encompasses standard job descriptions ( **El-Ghabbour, 2015**).

Job performance is the set of worker's behaviors that can be monitored, measured, and assessed regarding the achievement in the individual level good job. Performance of individuals is a necessary factor in determining an organization performance. Highly performing individuals will be able to assist organization to achieve its strategic aims and hence sustaining the competitive advantage for the organization. While low performance and non-achievement of the goals might be experienced as dissatisfaction, stress or even as a personal failure (**Abd Elhamed et al., 2019**).

Performance standards state the expectations for employee roles and responsibilities as they relate to the agency's mission, vision, and values. Performance standards are written, measurable criteria against which an employee's effort is evaluated to determine the level of functioning. They define how good is 'good enough. A performance standards is a management approved expression of the performance threshold, requirement, or expectation that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance (**schleich, 2021**).

The process of measurement and performance evaluation is a step in the series of the regulatory system in the organization. This process is difficult and facilitated by the accuracy of specific criteria that are not likely to be tried or evaluated. The more the criteria are clear and specific, the easier the measurement is, the faster and clearer the purpose of the regulatory system in any organization is to ensure that the actual performance of the planned performance is matched and to take the necessary action to correct the deviations shown by the evaluation and measurement (**Hariyati, & Ungsianik, 2018**).

The term performance appraisal (or performance evaluation) refers to the methods and processes used by organizations to assess the level of performance of their employees. This process usually includes measuring employees' performance and providing them with feedback regarding the level and quality of their performance (**Van Dijk & Schodl, 2015**). Evaluation of head nurses' quality of performance ensures quality patient care is improving. Today, it is vital for the nursing profession that the head nurses' performance quality evaluation is done by in hospitals level in order to determine the nursing systems' direction. In addition, the nursing sector in the health system make up the largest group, providing nursing care in the hospitals always is a crucial importance and many beneficial outcomes of health systems are a result of their activities (**Hojat, & Taheri, 2014**).

Performance management is a key tool to transform head nurses talent and motivation into a strategic business advantage. Performance management is a continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning their performance with the strategic goals of the organization. As well as is considered as a primary goal of every organization for achieving and maintaining effective performance of head nurses. (**Aguinis, 2019**).

Performance management goal is to create an environment where head nurses can perform to the best of their abilities to produce the highest quality work most efficiently and effectively (**Pagdonsolan, et al 2020**).

Performance management consists of three component: the first one focuses on performance goals, or what employee acts. The second concentrates on competency improvement, or how an employee does job responsibilities. The last component is the job development plan throughout which a supervisor and head nurse find out learning opportunities that help the achievement of both the head nurse performance goals and competency development. Additionally, the work improvement plan should document the head nurses career direction and strategy (**Chegini & janti, 2020**).

Head nurses' performance plays an important role in the successful operation of hospitals. Identification and prioritisation of managerial competencies required for head nurses and evaluation of their performance on this basis are necessary (**Moghaddam, Jame, Rafiei, Sarem, & Shafii, 2019**).

The job performance of head nurse is very important because of their strong effect on staff nurses. They interact with most staff nurses on an everyday basis and must act as a good role models, if they role weakly or were unsuccessful to stimulate their nursing staff, it may affect dramatically the work job performance of staff nurses which will lead to the desire to leave the unit or to work with less quality, low productivity, dissatisfaction and other passive attitude toward work and organization like to decrease the level of commitment to their work. So head nurses must continuously evaluate staff job performance (**Abd Elhamed, 2019**).

Top level nurse managers employ several performance improvement strategies in guiding the staff in work adaptation process and day-to-day tasks. The head nurse's performance improvement strategy has been discussed in several studies resulting in several strategies through developing an organizational culture and creating a positive work environment. This strategy provides comfort and job safety for nursing staff and managers, creates harmonious relationships between staff and superiors, and provides opportunities for unconstrained opinion. Another strategy is to apply effective leadership, guidance and optimal orientation, work flexibility, and certain professional career development (**Abd-Elrhaman, & Abd-Allah, 2018**). Strategies implemented by the nurse managers are often less successful due to several factors such as hospital policy, individual factors, and organizational factors. Good leadership support had greater impact on the effectiveness of the performance improvement strategy than less effective leadership support. (**Alshaya et al., 2017**).

### 3. Conclusion

In the light of the current review, it can be concluded that, head nurses must be able to effectively handle stress in order to create an environment that foster personal growth and ensuring high-quality patient care

and good job performance and the use of stress management techniques is critical for improving head nurses job performance and hence healthcare organizational success and efficiency.

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