

# Nursing Students' Time Management: Directing Activities toward Personal Goals

Tayebeh Mirzaei<sup>1</sup>, Fatemeh Oskouei<sup>2</sup>, Forough Rafii<sup>2\*</sup>, Ali Ravari<sup>1</sup>

1. Geriatric Care Research Center, Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences, Rafsanjan, Iran.

2. Nursing Care Research Center, School of Nursing & Midwifery, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The nursing students should acquire practical and theoretical competence required for the patients' care during their 4 years of education. This involves proper use of time. The purpose of this study was to investigate how nursing students manage their time despite the academic difficulties and obstacles.

**Methods:** This qualitative study was carried out through grounded theory method. The study population consisted of nursing students. Twenty-one nursing students studying at undergraduate level were selected purposefully for participation in this study. The data were collected with semi-structured interview and analyzed through Strauss and Corbin method (2008). MAXQDA 10 software was employed to organize and process the data.

**Results:** Core variable of this study was "directing activities toward personal goals," representing in 3 behavioral patterns. The behavioral pattern of "retaliation from field" was one of the 3 patterns applied by nursing students. The properties of this pattern included "unknowingly entrance to nursing field," "stress and dissatisfaction with spending time," "nonacceptance of field," "attempt to decrease stress and obtain satisfaction," and "ignoring academic responsibilities". According to this pattern, the students spent most of their time on non-academic responsibilities while trying to overcome the stress.

**Conclusion:** The findings of this study recommend the necessity for revising the admission method of nursing students and informed choice of nursing field by these students.

### Keywords:

Time management,  
Nursing students,  
Grounded theory, Stress

## 1. Background

**E**ver-increasing need of care system clients to high quality services with low expenses and change in the policies of care system calls for the nurses who are capable of performing their duty in different roles. According to the academic program of nursing field, the general purpose of nursing curriculum is to train individuals who will be able to offer rehabilitation, protection, management, consultation, research, education, and health care services as a member of health care team in order to secure, maintain, and promote individual, family, and society's health (Iran High Council planning regulations

of Medical Sciences 2005). Therefore, nursing students are faced with a lot of academic responsibilities (Seyed-Fatemi et al. 2007); furthermore, unlike secondary education in which the students are under the supervision of both families and school and have no non-academic responsibilities, at university they are faced with new responsibilities as nursing students and new expectations, which require time management (Eilam and Aharon 2003; Ravari et al. 2008; Mirzaei et al, 2012).

Time management, its use, and method of self-organizing to perform university responsibilities are considered important factors for representing students' attitude toward available time (Bonhomme 2007). Students' time

\* Corresponding Author:

Forough Rafii

Address: Nursing Care Research Center, School of Nursing & Midwifery, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Shahid Rashid Yasemi St., Vali-Asr Ave., Tehran, Iran.

Email: foroughrafii@yahoo.com

management can be regarded as a behavioral skill, which plays a role in organizing study and curriculum (Sangiriy et al. 2006).

Effective use of time enables nursing students to establish a balance between their educational and personal life (Arnold & Pulich 2004) and makes them more successful in tests (Prichard et al. 2006). Nursing student's time management will also prepare them for entering to clinical environment (Heslop et al. 2001; Rydon et al. 2008).

There is little information about contextual factors of time management behaviors in nursing students. The researchers sought to understand problems and nursing students' successes in estimating personal and academic needs of their life. In this regard, the grounded theory helped establish knowledge regarding this process because the grounded theory emphasizes on the recognition, description, and explanation of interactive processes between individuals and groups in a certain social context (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Hence, this property of grounded theory made the theory an ideal method for studying the issue of nursing students' time management. The purpose of this study was to investigate how nursing students manage their time.

## 2. Materials & Methods

This article was a result of a wider study, done with the purpose of clarifying time management process in nursing students and in paradigm of qualitative research using grounded theory approach by Strauss and Corbin (2008).

The study population consisted of nursing students. First, participants were selected purposefully from individuals who were interested to take part in the interview and had the required ability for sharing their experiences regarding the field of study. After some initial interviews, purposeful sampling turned into theoretical sampling and the sampling continued up to conceptual saturation.

The main method of collecting data was semi-structured interview. The notes of the students were used and during the interviews, field note taking was also done. Finally, conceptual saturation was achieved with 21 formal interviews. The MAXQDA 2007 & 10 was used for data management. The data analysis was consisted from 4 aspects such as: data analysis for concepts, data analysis for field, considering process in data analysis and combining the intended categories (Corbin & Strauss 2008). During data analysis for concepts, which started

with open coding, all existing probable findings in data were taken into account.

Having extracted the initial codes, they were classified according to the similarities and differences. Then the categories were classified into more abstract categories based on their specifications and dimensions. The data were simultaneously analyzed for contextual concepts. In this respect, attention was paid to conditions, which affected nursing students' time management. In other words, the researchers were seeking the ways, which led to problems that individuals of study were involved to alleviate them.

The next analytic step was to discover the process by which the individual respond to problems through reactions or emotions. The researchers thought deliberately about the categories in order to discover the strategies and behaviors, which the participants represent and simultaneously use far and near comparison methods. Memoing and diagram drawing were also used throughout the study. In this study, the process was represented by assessing conditions and progress toward the goal. The last step in data analysis was integrating the categories. In this stage, the categories were merged by writing story line, drawing diagrams, and reviewing memos. Finally, the core category of this study, consisting of "trying to decrease stress and achieve satisfaction" was emerged. The central concept of "trying to decrease stress and achieve satisfaction" was sufficient enough to relate all categories and subcategories of study. There were also traces of "trying to decrease stress and achieve satisfaction" in the data related to all participants.

In order to have confidence in scientific accuracy and validity of the data, the criteria proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008) were applied. To be assure of data credibility, the researcher used member checks. The theory and model of the study were confirmed by experts. With regard to comply with the logical procedure, the researchers used the method of peer review and submitted data in terms of having a logical procedure to individuals familiar with the method of qualitative research. Variability was another item, which was considered by researchers and they selected the participants with maximum variability with respect to socioeconomic status, age, sex, different semesters, being employed, and staying in dormitory or their personal house. The data were collected from students of different faculties in order to have variety in places where the data were gathered. In addition, different methods of data collection such as interview, field note taking, and journaling were used.

The data of this study were collected after obtaining the consent of Ethics Committee of Iran University of Medical Sciences as well as obtaining informed consent in order to observe ethical considerations of study. The consent letter was obtained from all participants after explaining the purposes of study. The time and place of interview were chosen upon agreement with participants. They were assured that their information will be confidential and they are free in answering or not answering questions. It was also explained to them that they are allowed to stop taking part in the study whenever they desire.

### 3. Results

The findings of this study revealed that the nursing students chose this field under compelling circumstances and based on their rank in entrance examination. This situation gave rise to stress and dissatisfaction with spending time. Some students who could not get along with their field until the completion of their course, perceived the necessity to lessen emphasis on the field when they wish to decrease stress and achieve satisfaction. They directed their activities toward personal goals and in this manner ignored their academic responsibilities (Figure 1). We will discuss the findings of this study in more detail.

#### Compulsory entrance to nursing field

As it was stated by the participants, nursing field was among their last priorities. Even some were entered to this field despite of having negative attitude toward it, so nursing was considered a kind of coercion for them. They believed that all of their efforts during preparation for entrance examination have been wasted. They also felt that they could not meet their family expectations.

Concerning choosing this field as the last priority, the 17th participant said: "Nursing was my 61st choice, medicine, dentistry, pharmacology, and genetics were my preferences. I really don't know how I chose this field (5th semester)."

The 12th participant said: "Since childhood I hated nursing. I became very upset when I heard that I have been accepted in this field (4th semester)."

#### Stress and dissatisfaction with spending time

Uncertainty, indifference, and dissatisfaction with spending time represented stress and dissatisfaction of students with spending time.

#### Uncertainty

Nursing students mainly had no definite purpose since they started their study and were most of the time indecisive whether to continue or resign. The 20th participant said: "I always tell myself to study and plan again for medicine when I return home. But as soon as I got home, I regretted (3rd semester)."

#### Indifference

Success or failure in nursing was not important for the students. In this regard, the 10th participant said: "It was not important to me at all. Failing a course was not important to me. Nothing was important to me. I just wanted these four years to be finished (6th semester)."

The students did not care about attending the classes and they just wanted to spend those times somehow. The 15th participant said: "Sometimes I didn't attend at classes. I was absent or I just stayed at class for 30 minutes, then left for 5 minutes and returned again (6th semester)."

#### Dissatisfaction with spending time

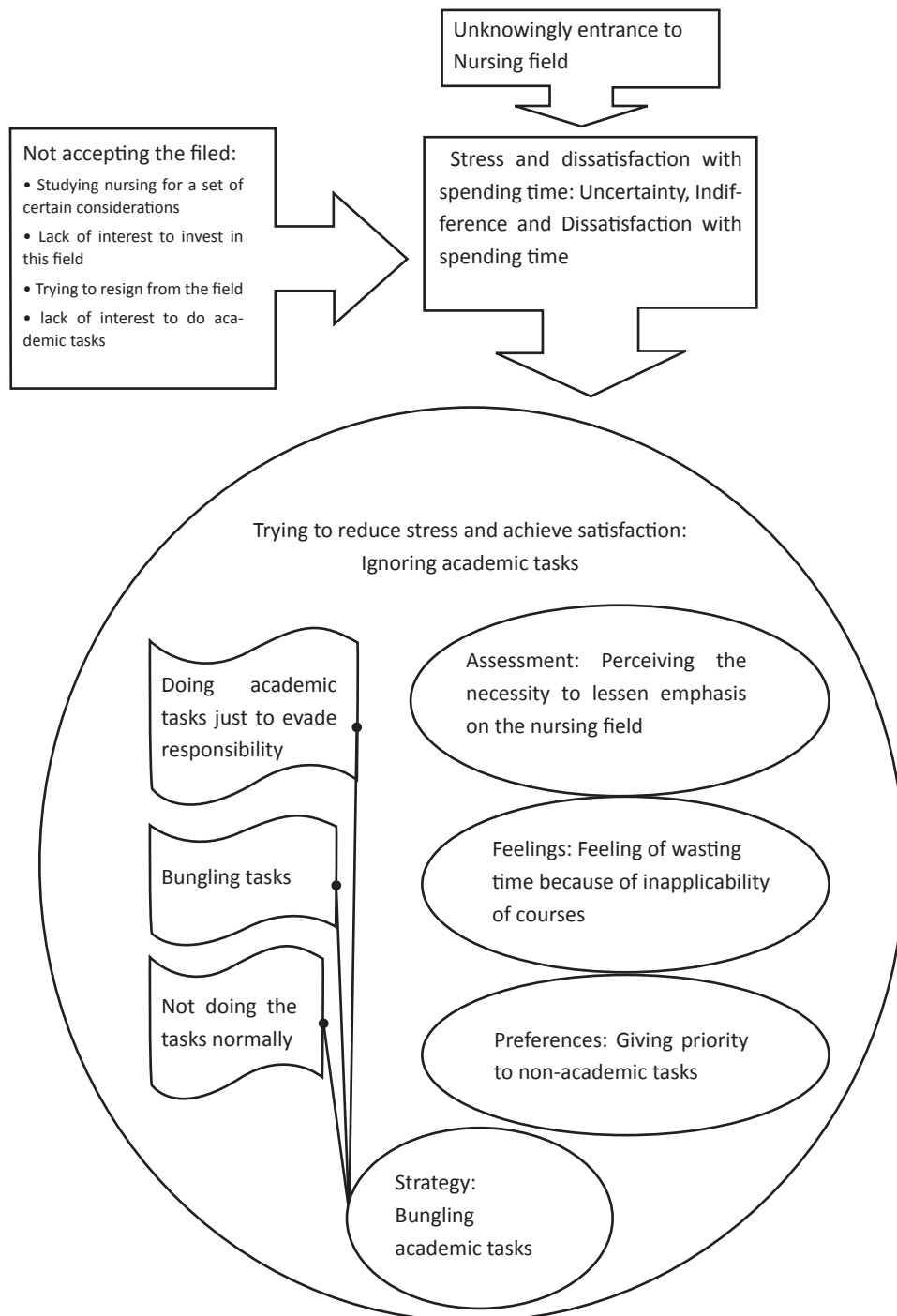
Stress and dissatisfaction in some students made them worried without doing anything special. The 17th participant said: "There was too much workload, I couldn't do anything, and I just grieved and didn't study (5th semester)."

The students could not control the time. The 17th participant said: "I had no time and was baffled about what to do. For example, I was at home and was free although I had many things to do. I have no idea of what to do (4th semester)."

#### Not accepting the field

Beside the stress and dissatisfaction, some students could not accept the field until the end of academic year. Some students were studying in this field for some certain observations such as using nursing as a bridge to enter other majors, studying nursing to gratify family, lack of interest to invest in the field, failed attempt to resign from study, feeling of wasting time because the lessons are not applicable, lack of interest to do academic responsibilities.

With regard to using nursing as a bridge to enter other fields, the 20th participant said: "I read somewhere written by University of Tehran that if your average grade rises higher than 16, and have TOEFL, you can take part in an exam and change your major from nursing, mid-



**Diagram 1.** Nursing Students' Time Management: Directing Activities toward Personal Goals. Client-Centered Nursing Care

wifery, radiology, or laboratory sciences to medicine. I had another decision that if I couldn't study medicine, I will study English and will continue that (3rd semester).”

Gratifying families was another reason for which the nursing students continued their studies. In this regard, the 10th participant said: “I am studying this field only because of my parents' efforts (6th semester).”

Another characteristic, which marked not accepting the field was failure in resigning from this field. The 10th participant said: “When I was admitted to this field, I thought of changing the field and study a better one. I have decided to resign many times, but I regretted (6th semester).”

The other characteristic was feeling of wasting the time because the courses were not applicable. In this regard, the 20th participant said: "I am studying things, which are useless. It's really wasting the time (3rd semester)."

One of the other characteristics of not accepting the field was lack of interest in doing academic tasks. The 20th participant said: "While I was at hospital I was always waiting for the break and I was killing the time (3rd semester)."

The students could not continue this situation, therefore they were seeking to reduce the stress and achieve satisfaction.

#### **Trying to reduce the stress and achieve satisfaction: ignoring academic tasks**

The results revealed that the students who did not accept the field, ignored their academic tasks while they were trying to reduce the stress and achieve satisfaction. These students perceived the necessity to lessen the emphasis on their field and treated their academic tasks in a way as if they were retaliating their field. Hence, they had no motivation for doing their academic tasks and gave the priority to non-academic tasks and did their academic tasks in a perfunctory manner. In other words, they were bungling their tasks. In normal conditions, these students spent their time on non-academic tasks and since they were looking to pass nursing courses, they postponed studying to the exam night.

Regarding "perceiving the necessity to lessen emphasis on nursing field", the 9th participant said: "As soon as I realized that I can't achieve the things I wanted through this field, I decided to do non-academic activities. I started playing music, working in a theater group, didn't know whether to update my poem weblog or not. These things made me not to be so disappointed. Because the way we were treated at hospitals was somehow disappointing (5th semester)."

The strategies these students used for bungling tasks were as follows: doing academic tasks just to evade responsibility, bungling academic tasks, not normally doing tasks, assigning academic tasks to others, and doing tasks just for passing courses.

Regarding doing academic tasks just to evade responsibility, the 14th participant said: "It is just important to do the tasks. I just presented my researches and conference in a short summary (4th semester)."

Regarding not doing the tasks normally, the 16th participant said: "Most of my tasks were not done normally. I just invented a new definition for tasks, used a new tool, or anyway it was not in a routine manner (7th semester)."

In most cases, the students assigned their tasks to others. The 10th participant said: "In most cases where I am supposed to submit an article, I asked someone to write it for me, someone to translate it, someone to type it, and someone to make a power point (6th semester)."

These students consciously postponed doing tasks to almost exams and postponed studying the lessons to night before exam. In this regard, the 10th participant said:

"I can swear that my information is at diploma level. I passed all courses by studying at nights before exam. I don't study until there is an exam. Last semester, I studied course of internal surgery exactly the night before the exam (6th semester)."

#### **4. Discussion**

In our country, because of the limitations in capacity of university fields and too many applicants, the candidates who got higher ranks would be admitted to fields such as medicine, which has more attraction. And the participants with lower ranks will be admitted to fields such as nursing, which has fewer applicants (Tabari-Khomeiran & Deans 2007). Therefore, most of nursing students have not selected this field as their first choice (Nikbakht-Nasrabadi et al. 2004).

The findings of this study indicated that nursing students spent a lot of time for preparing themselves for the exam, but after entering to the university they face with a kind of stress and dissatisfaction. Some of the students cannot accept this field during their studies. These students perceive the necessity for putting less emphasis on nursing field and ignoring their academic tasks.

The perception of the necessity for putting less emphasis on nursing field was due to the feeling that this field is not practical and academic tasks are worthless. This understanding of the academics tasks may be due to the feeling that the nursing instructors and students have no special status in clinical environments. In other words, presence or absence of instructor and students at ward is not recognized. Besides, these students believed that during assessment, there is no difference between different levels of nurses' merits. Therefore, there is no need to spend much time on nursing tasks.

Sometimes, when the students perceive the necessity for putting less emphasis on nursing, they got interested in studying a field other than nursing. Kiger, Yekta, Tabari and Ahmadi (2006) named marginalizing academic tasks under the title of "lack of sufficient effort to achieve nursing merits". Ignoring academic tasks can also be seen in participants of study of Ognor and Mon (2006). As stated by these researchers, the participants of their study included 535 students studying Humanities and Natural Sciences. They spend one-fifth of their time on academic tasks and the rest on other tasks such as religious, social, and economic activities. Ignoring academic tasks was also seen in the study of Bonhomme (2007). The participants of his study were African-American students who normally gave priority to non-academic tasks (such as social activities, work, family, non-academic institutions) and spend more time on those activities. Almost 37.1% of the participant in the study of Halabi, Khalaf, Abu-Moghli, and Wardam (2005) stated that they just studied for their exams.

In some texts, ignoring academic tasks is entitled as "procrastination". The most common form of procrastination is to postpone tasks and studying for exams until the last minute (Akinsola et al, 2007). The participants in study of Vanderberg (2008) applied procrastination as a strategy for time management.

Koing and Kleinmann (2007) argued about choosing different tasks among several responsibilities which the individuals have: "People think about what they will achieve by either doing task A or B. If task A has more benefits, they are encouraged to do task A rather than task B. In other words, the individuals overestimate the intended benefit". In this regard, Woodruff and Schallert (2008) considered the role of motivation to be more important. They believe that when people feel that they have control over what they are doing and know what will happen as a result of these works, they feel independent and are encouraged toward activities for which they have the most motivation.

Other characteristics of these students were studying the night before exam. In most cases, these students purposefully postpone their tasks to the night before the exam. Since they were not studying during the semester and looked for passing courses, they were forced to spend a lot of time on academic tasks and suffered from too much stress during exams. Participants in the study of Bonhomme (2007) with underachievement stated too much stress during the exams.

The relationship between time management, performance and stress has been shown in the findings of other researchers. They believe that: time management is a way to reduce stress and increases efficiency, satisfaction, and health (Macan et al. 1990). time management means a set of behaviors, which reduces stress and improves productivity (Pulford and Sohal, 2006) and the people who manage their time better have less stress and perceive themselves more effective (Kearns & Gardiner 2007).

There were also contradictory findings, which revealed perceiving structure and purpose in using time reduces concern and not the behaviors of time management (Kelly, 2003). What distinguishes our findings is that the present study was done with a descriptive method within which many influencing factors on selecting pattern of time consuming has been specified. On the other hand, the pattern of ignoring academic tasks was one pattern among students' academic time management patterns.

In this study, we investigated how nursing students prioritize and design their academic and non-academic activities and how and why they perform these activities. This study revealed that how the experiences related to field will influence performance of nursing students' time management.

Based on findings of this study, nursing students' time managed was accompanied with personal motivations. Some of the students, who did not accept the field, refused to value academic tasks. They were faced with a kind of innate struggle. They were caught in a dilemma whether to spend their time on academic tasks or other tasks and finally considering their mental purposes, they preferred to spend most of their time on non-academic tasks. These students studied mainly a few days and nights before the exam. Therefore, the learned materials were placed in their short-term memory and learning process was temporary. This matter made them disqualified for caring the patients. The result of this situation was graduates who had passed courses but were disqualified for caring the patients. In case they were employed, they would lack the required motivation for caring the patients (Ravari et al. 2012; Ravari et al. 2013).

Study of nursing by disinterested students is the wasting of the human and financial resources of country. This will give rise to dissatisfaction in the society of nursing field and negative attitude of the society. In some of the nursing texts, a decrease in the quality of nursing services was mentioned (Adib-Hajbaghery & Dianati 2005). Molazem (2010) in her PhD thesis investigated

the process of nursing care in surgery ward. According to her findings, one of the reasons for inefficacy of nursing care in surgery ward is the deficiency in nursing training, which appeared as one of the categories of her study (Adib-Hajbaghery & Dianati 2005).

It seems that providing conditions for admission of students whose nursing is their own choices is an important step for solving this problem. Furthermore, planned consultation for nursing students at undergraduate level with concentration on nursing profession is considered necessary.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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